SIMON CLARKE

Althusserian Marxism

Introductory note

This paper has a long history. The original draft was written in 1970 on the basis of an attempt to relate *Reading Capital* to a reading of *Capital*. This was a task that I began with a certain limited sympathy for Althusser's interpretation, at least to the extent of agreeing that *Capital* is Marx's central work and of agreeing that *Capital* is not simply a work of economics. However it was a task that ended in total frustration as a result of a failure to find any substantial connection between *Reading Capital* (with the exception of Rancière's contribution that was suppressed in the second edition and in the English translation) and *Capital*. Drawing such a negative conclusion, and naïvely imagining that others would reach the same conclusion, I put the draft in my bottom drawer.

As the years went by it became clear that Althusserianism was not the passing fancy of a few avant-garde intellectuals, but that it was rapidly becoming a major intellectual current, indeed the dominant form of marxism among the generation of students and academics who encountered marxism after 1968. After some years of continuing fondly to imagine that it would go away of its own accord, I sat down in 1976 to take up my critique again. The paper that follows is the result.

It turned out that it was not a bad time to sit down to a critique of Althusserian marxism. In 1976 Althusserianism seemed to be at its highest point. Even marxists from non-Althusserian backgrounds were abdicating, either espousing Althusserianism or, tacitly or explicitly, abandoning hope for marxism. However, the tyranny of Althusserianism, expressed in its attempt to proclaim itself the only true faith, had also reached such a pitch that increasing numbers of marxists who had happily ignored Althusserianism began to question the Althusserian claims, diffidently at first, but with growing self-confidence over the last three years. This counter-current was given added strength by the fragmentation of the Althusserian camp into orthodox Althusserians, the followers of Lacan, of Foucault, or of various brands of Hindess and Hirst. The claim to represent the only true faith was weakened, as always, by the schismatic tendencies that

offered a rapid proliferation of only-true-faiths, caricatured in its most extreme form by Hindess and Hirst, whose many publishers could not keep up with the succession of doctrinal reversals which they inflicted on their increasingly bemused flock.

The initial reception of this paper was mixed. I was very gratified by the enthusiastically positive response of those comrades with whom I was working and those who shared my rejection of Althusserianism, but at first these were few and far between. The most common response was one of surprise that anyone should reject the Althusserian enterprise *in toto,* as I was doing. This seemed to reflect the effectiveness with which Althusserianism has established its claim to represent the only true, scientific, anti-economist marxism, and to consign all other interpretations of Marx to the dustbin of history. Many who did not follow Althusser, or had little interest in doctrinal questions, still felt that Althusser was asking the right questions, even if his answers were inadequate or incomplete. Many disliked Althusser's own politics, or specific Althusserian claims, while still identifying the Althusserian project with that of Marx. The response from Althusserians was one of outrage, and newcomers to the debate should be warned that my interpretation of Althusser is by no means uncontentious. The paper was described in the following terms by anonymous readers: "almost entirely inadequate ... repetitively stated ... incoherent ... a bald series of assertions ... crude distortions ... misrepresentations ... grotesque misreading ... a form of intellectual dishonesty ... pathetic". A rather less sympathetic Althusserian reader considered it "the worst article I have ever read on Althusser ... the very worst kind of dogmatic, ill-informed polemic ... absolutely appalling ... a sloganising and dogmatic manner ... an absence of analysis . . .a series of totally unsubstantiated attacks ... the article is worthless ... nothing short of scandalous ... nonsense ... the most philistine and philosophically naïve epistemology . . . absolutely breath-taking . . ."

Since 1976 the paper has circulated quite widely in duplicated form, and has elicited increasingly favourable responses that seem to indicate that the ranks of the dishonest sloganising philistines are growing fast, and that more and more people are prepared to reconsider Althusserianism not in minor details but in its foundations. However, despite this groundswell it remains the case that it is Althusserianism that dominates the publishers' lists, and Althusserians who dominate among editorial advisers to those publishers prepared to consider marxist works.

In the last three years there have been considerable developments within Althusserianism, leading to a proliferation

of small sects. Although some of these sects reject the divinity of Althusser, I continue to consider them Althusserian because their heresies arise out of the internal development of the faith. Thus the two-volume romp by A. Cutler, B. Hindess, P. Hirst and A. Hussain, *Marx's "Capital" and Capitalism Today,* counterposes the latest heresy to something identified as "marxist orthodoxy" which is nothing other than the Althusserian faith to which the authors originally adhered.

My paper was written before the emergence of the more recent Althusserian heresies, and so considered only the earlier work of Hindess and Hirst, *Precapitalist Modes of Production,* and that only in footnoted asides. In commenting on that work I must now admit that I occasionally caricatured it and attributed to Hindess and Hirst positions that they were not to adopt explicitly until their self-criticism. At the time this was a polemical device, drawing out the implications of their argument to show the absurdities they were led into. The force of this device was weakened when, to my amazement, Hindess and Hirst followed the logic of their arguments through to such absurdities. However, this paper is not concerned with the finer points of Althusserian doctrine, nor is it concerned to provide a complete account of Althusser's political and theoretical development. It is concerned with the foundations of Althusserianism laid out in his most influential works, *Reading Capital* and *For Marx.* For this reason, and because the paper has already been quite widely quoted, I have not made major changes in it for publication here.

Finally, a few words need to be said about the form of this paper. It is an interpretation of Althusser that, at the time it was written, was outrageous. It would be possible to support the interpretation by extensive quotation from Althusser's works, but extensive quotation could equally well be used to refute this interpretation. For this reason the form of the paper is that of a textual commentary on Althusser's major works, and I have made very little use of direct quotation. This means that the reader should easily be able to evaluate my interpretation for him or herself by turning to the original texts that I discuss. It is important to make this point in order to counter the charges of distortion or of falsification. I do not imagine that my readers are incapable of reading Althusser for themselves and making up their own minds, and I hope that the form of presentation that I have adopted will make this as easy as possible for them.

No paper of this length can offer a comprehensive account of Althusserianism, nor a comprehensive account of alternative interpretations of Marx. In this paper I concentrate on offering a critical interpretation of Althusser's two basic and most

influential texts. In extensive footnotes, however, I also offer a more sketchy commentary that touches on later developments in the work of Althusser and of his followers, and on wider philosophical and theoretical tendencies to which Althusserianism is related. Those who are interested in the central interpretation and critique of Althusser can read the text without getting bogged down in the more esoteric points elucidated in the footnotes. Those who are interested in trying to situate Althusser's work in a wider perspective, or in relating the work of later Althusserians to the canonical texts, might find some of the footnote commentary suggestive or provocative, even if it does not provide rigorous analysis. The aim of the footnotes is to indicate the ways in which my interpretation of Althusser's central texts can also illuminate the other aspects of Althusserianism not touched on here.

In this paper I concentrate on Althusser's interpretation of Marx's theory of society, and particularly the Althusserian notion of the mode of production. I devote relatively little attention to Althusser's methodological discussions, or to his theory of ideology, both of which have been influential. Althusser's methodology, inconsistent as it is, seems to me to be quite unoriginal, offering banal versions of a range of the more esoteric versions of neo-positivism whose basic position of a separation of thought and reality ("theory" and "observation") leads in both cases to linguistic idealism of one form or another. This methodology has been extensively discussed elsewhere. In this context I would like particularly to recommend Edward Thompson's spirited defence of the empirical idiom in *The Poverty of Theory.* The importance of this work is that it addresses the methodological problems confronted by the practice of historical materialism and so satisfies the Althusserian's own insistence that philosophy cannot legislate for "science", but that each "science" has to define its own methods, an insistence systematically ignored in the ruminations of the Althusserian epistemological censors. I offer only brief footnote comments on the theory of ideology, but I hope that this gap is amply compensated for by the papers by Terry Lovell and by Kevin Robins and Kevin McDonnell in this volume. Finally, I have written elsewhere on the development of the Althusserian model by Poulantzas and by the "vulgar Poulantzians", and on the foundations of structuralism in the work of Lévi-Strauss.[1] Thus this paper is restricted in its scope and should be read not in isolation, but as a part of a growing movement of intellectual and political resistance to Althusserianism that cannot be glibly dismissed as the moralistic droolings of outraged bourgeois humanists to which the

Althusserians (like their political mentors) would reduce all opposition.

The interpretation of Marx that I offer in opposition to the Althusserians is characterised as broadly as possible in the hope that I can avoid counterposing one rigid orthodoxy to another. Marxism has been plagued since its inception by the fact that the leadership of marxist political movements has not trusted its followers to read Marx for themselves, but has insisted on offering predigested versions of Marx. I do not want to offer such a substitute in this paper. Thus the paper is at times very dense, because it is trying to deal concisely with major questions, and at times only suggestive, because it is trying to open up discussion of Marx's work and not to impose a new closure. If at times the tone of the paper is assertive and dogmatic this is because there are some points on which I think it is essential to make a stand, even if they cannot be elaborated in a brief space. However, I have no authority for my views beyond the texts that Marx has left behind and the mass of conflicting interpretations that have been a part of the living reality of the working-class movement. Thus I am more than happy for the reader to disagree, and if my tone stimulates disagreement and induces the reader to make up his or her own mind, then my aim would have been achieved. This paper is a polemic and not an encyclical, the aim of which is to ask people not to take Althusserianism at face value; to ask them to read Marx before *For Marx, Capital* before *Reading Capital,* and to read it not as the fossil form of the Logos but as the product of a lifetime's involvement in political and ideological struggle in which Marx sought to forge a weapon for the proletariat in the battle for socialism, a socialism which for Marx could only have a *human* face.

The argument

The development of capitalist crisis and of working-class militancy in the mid-1960s created the context in which left intellectuals in Britain, as elsewhere, developed an interest in the Marx of the working-class movement, turning away from the various attempts to interpret Marx in terms of a philosophy of the subject. This was the context in which Althusser replaced Sartre and Lukács as the "grid" through which Marx was read. At the time it seemed that Althusserianism was merely a passing phase, a stop on the way to Marx himself. However the Althusserian enthusiasm had lasted just long enough to leave a generation who had come to read Marx through Althusser, to substitute *For Marx* for Marx, *Reading Capital* for reading *Capital.* The legacy of this phase is not an Althusserian movement, as caricatured briefly by

Theoretical Practice, which lacked any political base. The legacy is found in a new orthodoxy in the interpretation of Marx, embodied in a series of concepts and assumptions whose Althusserian origins have been largely effaced. This is the new context in which it seems to me that a renewed critique of Althusserianism is necessary, a critique which focuses on the point which earlier critiques deliberately and specifically omitted, the question of the adequacy of Althusser's interpretation of Marx.[2]

In order to write such a critique it is necessary to find some basis on which the critique may be coherently presented. The most impressive attempt to impose a purely theoretical coherence on Althusser's work is that of Glucksmann, who sees Althusserianism as a variant of bourgeois metaphysical philosophy.[3] One could construct equally convincing accounts of Althusserianism as a variant of the Lacanian interpretation of Freud, in which the economic plays the role of Freudian unconscious, the political the role of the conscious, and the theorist that of the analyst.[4] One could add other structuralist influences to the Lacanian inspiration and see Althusserianism as an "overdetermined" system: the philosophy of the concept derived from Cavaillès,[5] the Lévi-Straussian conception of society as an "order of orders".[6] One could follow Poulantzas in seeing Althusserianism alternatively as an attempt to transcend the opposition between structure and history represented by the opposition between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, attempting to historise Lévi-Strauss's structures by structuring Sartre's practice. All these constructions could be convincing, but all have to *impose* a coherence on Althusser, and none give him a marxist pedigree.

Examination of theoretical antecedents can reveal a host of contradictory influences on Althusser's work, but cannot reveal its *specific* foundations. However much Althusser may borrow from bourgeois theorists, his *starting* point is marxist, and, specifically, the marxism of the orthodox communist movement. There is no doubt that Althusser's work begins as a reconsideration of stalinist "dogmatism" in the light of developments subsequent to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, and represents an attempt to develop a critique of the "economism" of that dogmatism that does not fall into the twin "deviations" of "humanism" and "historicism".[7] These have historically been the terms which have been applied to the opposition to dogmatism from the right and from the left, forms of opposition that re-emerged in the communist movement in the wake of destalinisation. Hence Althusser seeks essentially to perpetuate communist orthodoxy, but to set that orthodoxy on a new foundation, and this explains his readiness to draw on sources which have hitherto been

unorthodox for a communist. His entire work is characterised by the tension between the orthodox and the unorthodox, the two being brought together around the supposed focus of Althusser's work, the reinterpretation of marxist theory. This reinterpretation involves the invocation of a real, but hitherto unknown, Marx, who can only be recovered from the marxist texts through the grid of a "reading", which has in fact involved the abandonment of most of Marx's work as non-marxist, and the replacement of most of Marx's own concepts by others introduced by Althusser.

In this paper I want to establish that the interpretation of Marx proposed by Althusser in no sense represents a renewal of marxism. Rather I want to show that Althusser's attempt to refound a dispirited orthodoxy leads him inexorably to the adoption of theoretical and philosophical positions which can be rigorously characterised as "bourgeois". Hence Althusserianism offers familiar, if rather esoteric, bourgeois ideologies wrapped, often insecurely, in marxist rhetoric, which serves to give both bourgeois ideologies and stalinist politics an authentically marxist appearance. It is this duplicity which makes Althusserianism so dangerous, for it induces many sincere marxists to enter a labyrinth in which increasing frustration can lead them to abandon marxism itself.

In the first section I shall try to indicate theoretically the course which led Althusser from an attempt to find a new foundation for the authority of the intellectual within the party, and of the party within the working class, to the adoption of a bourgeois theory of society and associated bourgeois philosophy. I shall then try to establish the bourgeois foundations of Althusser's work by examining his and Balibar's main contributions.

Althusserianism, stalinism and bourgeois sociology

The context of Althusser's project is the period of destalinisation after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. For Althusser, as a philosopher, destalinisation meant the end of Zhdanovism, of subordination of philosophy to the party, and so the possibility both of recovering the professional respect of colleagues and of intervening in political activity on an independent basis, as an intellectual. The project which the Althusserians set themselves was the political restoration of the French Communist Party (PCF) through the restoration of the thought of Marx, seeking in the revolutionary experience of the Soviet Union in 1917, and of China in 1937, the lessons which, mediated by theory, could underpin a rational politics in France in the 1960s. This project rested on a belief, also expressed in the introduction to *For Marx*, that the political errors of the PCF were to be explained by its lack

of theory, a lack of theory which made the Party very vulnerable to theoretical and practical "opportunism" in the event of its abandonment of stalinist dogmatism.[8] This project apparently begins, therefore, with an innocent return to the texts of Marx.

The innocence of this return is, however, only superficial. Althusser does not approach the works of Marx, Lenin or Mao as a disinterested student of the texts. These works provide only an authority to which he, as an intellectual, can refer to support an ambition which is already inscribed in his political project. The starting point of Althusser's project is the critique of the crude economism and evolutionism of stalinist dogmatism, while avoiding those interpretations dubbed "humanist", which Althusser sees as being simply the other face of economistic interpretations, the two united in their "historicist" understanding of the marxist dialectic. Althusser's initial project is therefore to purge marxism of all traces of "historicism".

Rancière argues very convincingly that whatever original political ambition the critique of stalinist dogmatism may have had, the project soon became its own justification. Since Althusser was committed to the transformation of the PCF from within, it was necessary for him to find an authority for his theory higher than that of the party, which had hitherto ruled in such matters. His work, therefore, soon comes to be dominated by the need to find in Marx the justification not directly for his politics, but for his project of intellectual subversion. The basis of his "anti-historicism" is therefore the need to establish the autonomy of theory and the authority of the theorist. This underpins the early insistence on the separation of marxist philosophy from historical materialism, the defence of the autonomy of "theoretical practice", the insistence on the priority of dialectical over historical materialism and so of philosophy over politics, as well as the later transformation of the definition of philosophy which altered these relationships, but left the position of theory and the theorist unchanged.

Rancière argues that Althusser's project soon finds itself in a hopelessly contradictory position. In order to subvert the PCF from within on the basis of the authority of theory and in the absence of a significant political base, it is necessary to have the confidence of the leadership of the party. Until theory has achieved the transformation of the party, it is necessary to subordinate oneself to the leadership of the party in order to be able to continue the process of theoretical subversion. The long-term strategy of theoretical subversion of the dogmatism which continued to dominate the PCF demanded a short-term tactic of accommodation to, if not defence of, the theses of the leadership of

the PCF. It is this contradiction which, as Rancière shows, illuminates another series of fundamental Althusserian distinctions: the separation of ideology, within which politics is fought out, from science, of an empirical from a theoretical rhetoric.[9] These distinctions make it possible for Althusser to dissociate his theoretically subversive formulations from their apparent political implications, a technique which is apparent in his essay "Marxism and Humanism", in *For Marx,* and which was used to counter the accusation of Maoist tendencies on the appearance of the essay "On the Materialist Dialectic".[10]

Rancière charts the progressive inversion of tactical and strategic considerations in Althusser's work from 1963 onwards. It was in 1963 that Althusser made his only direct political intervention, objectively on behalf of the leadership of the PCF, attacking the nascent student movement for its challenge to the integrity of science. This attack had serious consequences for the subsequent development of the student movement in its creation of an "authoritarian left" current which stood above the revolt of the students and young workers. From this time the attack on "economism" was veiled, all Althusser's polemics being aimed at "humanism" and "historicism", theoretical tendencies which the cognoscenti knew to be complementary to "economism", but which also happened to represent the internal opposition to the PCF leadership from the right and from the left.[11] The subversive elements of Althusserianism became increasingly esoteric, while the attacks on "humanism" and "historicism" strengthened the leadership they were supposed to undermine, providing a means of restoring the authority of that leadership among the intellectuals by attacking its political opponents in the name of the texts of Marx and Lenin and not directly of the authority of the party. The crunch came in 1965, with the publication of *Reading Capital.* This work came under sharp attack from the PCF leadership not for the attack on "historicism", which was the esoteric radical element in the work (but which, as we shall see, can equally have reactionary implications), but for the autonomy which was attributed to theory, precisely Althusser's defence against the subordination of his intellectual project to the dictates of the political leadership of the party. The latter was worried because the left leadership of the Communist students' organisation, the UEC, was using similar arguments to defend its right to political autonomy. It could not therefore tolerate a competing authority in the interpretation of Marx, even if that authority was Marx himself. In response to just criticism, Althusser reissued *Reading Capital* with the omission of the more scandalous texts, and made his self-criticism in *Lenin and Philosophy.*[12]

I do not outline this sordid history as the basis of an *ad hominem* critique, but because it is necessary to an understanding of the origins of Althusserianism. When Althusser undertook the task of regeneration in the early 1960s, to counterpose Marx to the party as an authority was a very radical move. Althusser almost immediately came under pressure from within the party, the result of which was that Althusser's project came to be focused entirely on establishing its own possibility by establishing the autonomy of theory. With Althusser's self-criticism the autonomy of theory in relation to the party, and with it the attempt to put forward an original interpretation of Marx, was effectively abandoned. His serious work is therefore largely confined to his period of independence from 1960 to 1965.

In this period the attempt to establish the autonomy of theory through the reinterpretation of Marx led to the imposition of a particular conception of society on Marx's work. Hence the particular, and rather parochial, ambition of Althusser's reinterpretation acquired a much wider significance. The tragedy of Althusserianism is that the conception of society in question is that which dominates both stalinist dogmatism and bourgeois sociology.

Rancière focuses his critique on the affinity between Althusser's conception of the relation between theory and politics and the mechanical materialist conception which Marx destroyed in his "Theses on Feuerbach". However the affinity between Althusser's work and the dominant forms of bourgeois ideology is both broader and more fundamental than this.

The link between Althusser's particular ambition and his adoption of a bourgeois ideological conception of society is very direct. Althusser's particular ambition is to establish the autonomy and authority of mental over manual labour. This relationship between the mental and the manual is, however, a peculiar characteristic of capitalist production relations. In order to show, therefore, that this peculiar characteristic of capitalism is socially necessary, Althusser has recourse to a theory which establishes the social necessity of capitalist production relations themselves, and this "eternisation" of capitalist relations of production is precisely the defining characteristic of bourgeois ideology. Thus it is that Althusser follows mechanical materialism in confusing the social and technical divisions of labour: in identifying the separation of mental from manual labour, and the subordination of one to the other, with the technical requirements of production with an advanced divison of labour, and not with *the domination of capital over labour and the associated appropriation of the creative powers of labour by capital.* This

confusion is the basis of a series of ideologies which serve to justify the subordination of labour: to capital in bourgeois ideology, to the reformer in utopian socialism, to the party and to the state in stalinism. It is the ideological foundation of the eternisation of bourgeois relations of production, constituted in its classical form by the political economy whose definitive critique was made by Marx and whose renunciation is the necessary basis of any authentic marxism.[13] Let us look more closely at this ideology.

Classical political economy bases itself on a distinction between production, which is seen in technical terms as the realm in which labour sets to work means of production to make products, and distribution, in which the product is transformed into revenues which accrue to the various classes in society. Relations of distribution are therefore superimposed on production as the social framework within which material production takes place. In the capitalist mode of production the superimposition of relations of distribution on relations of production is achieved simply by ascribing revenues to factors of production and assigning classes to these factors as "owners". It is therefore ownership of the means of production which provides the foundation for the major distributive classes of which society is composed. This conception of society is based on the "trinity formula", the form of appearance of bourgeois relations of production according to which the "factors of production" are the sources of the revenues of the component classes of society. It is a form of appearance which eternises bourgeois relations of production, because it makes them appear as relations already inscribed in the technical structure of the material production process. It is an *ideology* because it postulates as eternal that which is historically specific, it is a *bourgeois* ideology because what it postulates as eternal is the bourgeois production relation. In so far as such eternisation of bourgeois relations of production is the *sine qua non* of bourgeois ideology, in the rigorous sense of that term, it is this conception of society which is the foundation of all bourgeois ideology.

This conception of society, although it is fundamentally bourgeois, can also be found underlying certain ideologies which have played a major role in the working-class movement. The relation between Ricardianism and utopian socialism is well known. Utopian socialism is characterised by the above bourgeois conception of society, basing itself on a *moral* critique of bourgeois relations of *distribution*, and so aiming at the transformation of relations of distribution without any transformation of bourgeois relations of production, the revolution being introduced from *outside* because of the necessarily *moral* basis of the utopian critique. At a later stage of capitalist development "economism"

gave this bourgeois conception a new radical twist. Bourgeois relations of distribution continue to be founded on the technical relations of bourgeois production, but the socialisation of production, conceived as an increasing technical scale of production, leads progressively and naturally from competitive capitalism through monopoly capitalism to state capitalism, which is equated with socialism. Economism has a more scientific appearance than utopianism had. In reality, however, it has no scientific foundation at all, for it is simply not the case that the socialisation of production can be reduced to technical concentration, nor that the latter increases without limit. Hence the adoption of this "economistic" version of socialism, by basing itself on a conception of society which is in turn founded on the eternisation of capitalist relations of production, has the perpetuation of such relations as its practical consequence. This economism entered the Russian working-class movement through Plekhanov and Menshevism, and was criticised, though not unambiguously, by Lenin. In the wake of the revolution and the NEP, this economism crept back into the CPSU in the form of stalinist dogmatism, providing the means within the Soviet Union to establish the identification of development of the productive forces with the development of socialism and to establish the authority of the state, as representative of the social character of the process of production, over the isolated workers who are only its technical agents.

Marx's most fertile years were devoted to the elaboration of the critique of classical political economy. In this critique Marx shows that the errors of political economy derive from its conception of production. For Marx the relations of production are not separated from and contrasted with material production as an externally derived *form* imposed on a pre-existent *content.* Production is seen as a process which is indissolubly social and material, *production both of material products and of social relations.* Moreover this unity is not a harmonious unity, at least in a class society, but is a *contradictory unity:* the *contradictory unity of the forces and relations of production.* In a capitalist society this contradictory unity exists in the specific historical form of the contradiction between production as *the production of value and as the production of use-values.* It is this contradiction which Marx identifies at the beginning of *Capital,* in the "Hegelian" first chapter, where it is located at the heart of the commodity. The clear distinction between value and use-value, located in the "elementary form" of capitalist wealth, makes it possible for Marx to develop *for the first time* the contrast between concrete useful labour and abstract value-creating labour, the point which "is

crucial to an understanding of political economy" because it underpins such concepts as "labour power", "constant and variable capital", and "surplus value". The latter concept, is, for example, transformed. It is no longer seen as the revenue which accrues to a distributive class as its share of the material product. It is now seen as the product of the labour process as a process of production of value, of the *compulsion* imposed on the worker within the labour process to work beyond the time necessary to reproduce the value of his or her labour power:

> We now see that the difference between labour, considered on the one hand as producing utilities, and on the other hand as creating value, a difference which we discovered by our analysis of a commodity, resolves itself into a distinction between two aspects of the production process.
>
> The production process, considered as the unity of the labour process and the process of creating value, is the process of production of commodities; considered as the unity of the labour process and the process of valorisation, it is the capitalist process of production, or the capitalist form of the production of commodities.

This understanding of production therefore makes possible a theory which gives exploitation and class relations an *objective* foundation in production instead of a *subjective* foundation in a particular moral evaluation of the justice of relations of distribution.

The *contradictory* foundation of production is the key to the marxist theory of history and to the marxist concept of the totality. First, the *"law of motion" of capitalism,* expressed (perhaps misleadingly) in the tendential "law" of the falling rate of profit and the countervailing tendencies it calls forth, expresses the concrete *historical development* of the fundamental contradiction. Secondly, the relations of production are from the beginning *social* relations, "the relations of production in their totality constitute what are called the social relations, society, and specifically, a society at a definite stage of historical development."[15] There is, therefore, no question of reductionism in taking the relations of production as the starting point for the analysis. The determination of social relations as relations of production is *the specific and determinate historical process by which social relations are subsumed under the dominant relation of production and so are determined as developed forms of that relation.* The basis of this process is the contradictory foundation of production which constantly forces capital beyond the immediate process of production in order to accomplish its valorisation. In *Capital* Marx shows this rigorously for distribution, circulation and even consumption as moments of the total process of social production which are

subsumed historically in the relations constituted around the immediate process of production, subordinated to the production of value as moments of the process of valorisation of capital. Correspondingly, the social relations of production appear in specific economic, political and ideological forms, and their determination as moments of the "relations of production in their totality" can only be through their historical subsumption under the dominant relation of production in the development of the contradiction on which that relation is based, the analysis of which can establish concretely both the *forms of domination* of social relations by the capital relation and the *specific limits* of that domination.

It is very important to stress the fact that Marx is concerned with the concrete historical development of the fundamental contradiction, with specific and determinate historical processes, and not with the necessary development of the concept, whether this is interpreted in the Hegelian sense of the dialectical development of the Idea or in the positivist sense of the deductive elucidation of the fundamental postulates of the theory. Marx is developing a theory of real human history, he is not attempting to legislate for history, to dictate theoretically what history can and cannot be. It is in this sense that marxism is not a historicism: it does not seek to formulate either analytical or dialectical laws of historical development. Hence the contradictory foundation of production underlies the historical development of a society based on that form of production, but the contradiction cannot determine its own outcome. Thus even the "absolute general law of capitalist accumulation" is immediately qualified: "like all other laws, it is modified in its working by many circumstances."[16] For example, the "law" of the falling rate of profit does not determine that the rate of profit will fall. What it does determine is that an increase in the organic composition of capital, effected by, for example, the concentration or centralisation of capital, will lead to a fall in the rate of profit *unless* it is compensated by an increase in the rate of exploitation. Hence the law tells us to expect that the concentration and centralisation of capital will be associated not with a necessary fall in the rate of profit, but with the most strenuous efforts on the part of capital to increase the rate of exploitation by increasing the productivity of labour, by intensifying labour or by lengthening the working day. This law is not the logical elaboration of the concept, it is the theoretical formulation of a fundamental aspect of the everyday experience of the working class. In exactly the same way social relations are subsumed under the dominant relation of production not in a logical reduction which dissolves the specific characteristics of

those relations, but in a specific historical process through which capital, institutionalised (it must be added) in the capitalist enterprise, seeks to overcome the social barriers set to its valorisation and in so doing *tends* to seek to turn the whole of society into a machine for the production of surplus value. This is a specific historical process, it is a tendency that is resisted, and it is a contradictory process in which the barriers are never finally overcome. Hence the domination of capital in any particular society has specific limits, those limits being historical limits that are established through struggle and that cannot be defined in advance. It is *to the extent that* any particular social relation has been historically subsumed under the capital relation that it can be considered as a form of that relation, and only to that extent. This subsumption is never determined in advance, it is always contested, and it has constantly to be reimposed if it is to be maintained. Thus Marx is not trying to develop a predictive theory that can reduce the world to a set of formulae, he is trying to develop a deeper understanding of the forces in play in order to intervene more effectively to change the world: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, the point, however is to *change* it" wrote Marx in the last of his "Theses on Feuerbach", and presumably he meant it.

The errors of economism derive directly from its failure to grasp the significance of Marx's critique of classical political economy, and so from its retention of the bourgeois conception of production which characterises the latter. On the one hand, the *separation* of the forces and relations of production abolishes the dialectical relation between the two aspects of the process of production, so that the primacy of production takes the form of a technological determinism which necessarily rests on the metaphysical foundation of dogmatic claims about the nature of the world. On the other hand, because the "forces and relations of production" are seen as technical relations of production on which are superimposed social relations (of distribution), the *contradictory* foundation of production, and so the basis of the marxist theory of history, is abolished. Instead we have a relation between the "forces and relations of production" which is alternately one of correspondence and dislocation, and the theory of history is replaced by a metaphysical law of history, the "dialectic", seen as a mechanical, extra-historical law which determines history as a succession of modes of production by governing the progressive, and exogenous, development of the forces of production which underlies it, each mode being defined ahistorically by the specific *form of appropriation* of the surplus (rather than form of *production*) appropriate to a particular level of development of the

productive forces. The stalinist theory of modes of production, its separation of dialectical from historical materialism, and its evolutionism are all consequences of the adoption of the bourgeois conception of production.[17]

There can surely be no doubt that the starting point of any attempt to restore marxism must be the critique of this dogmatic version of marxism. To this extent Althusser's project does at least begin at the beginning, even if it does not make its true objective explicit. Althusser is also quite right to point out that not every critique of economism is a marxist critique. In particular, even if we might doubt the political motives and the wider theoretical implications of his attack, Althusser is quite right to point out the complementarity of the "humanist" critique to the "economist" deviation it sought to transcend. To this extent Althusser is quite right to attack the "historicism", that is to say the metaphysical philosophy of history, characteristic of both "economism" and "humanism". However the question we have to ask of Althusser is whether he actually gets to the root of these "deviations", whether he offers a fundamental critique which will enable us to restore its authentically revolutionary character to marxism, or whether he rather offers us a renewed version of dogmatism, deprived of its most "scandalous" dimensions, to accompany the elimination of the most "scandalous" aspects of stalinism in the renewal of the revisionism of the PCF.

In his *Reply to John Lewis* Althusser spells out for the first time his understanding of the "stalinist deviation". He sees stalinism as a renewal of the economism of the Second International, "the *posthumous revenge of the Second International*". He also sees this economism as a *bourgeois* deviation, determined as a moment of the economism-humanism couple which is supposedly characteristic of bourgeois ideology. Finally, he notes that this ideology is bourgeois because it eliminates the relations of production and the class struggle. Althusser presents these findings, which have, in one form or another, long been almost a commonplace among marxist critics of stalinism, as an original and tentative discovery ("this is only a hypothesis"). However, we must give Althusser credit for recognising the economism of stalinism, even if he did so rather late. But we now come to the heart of the matter. We have to ask whether Althusser offers us a marxist critique of this ideology.

The answer is that he does not. To see this we must look at the way Althusser appears to understand this couple. Althusser does not provide a *theoretical* critique of the couple at all. He argues that the complementarity of the elements of the couple is based on the complementarity of the "economism" of the capitalist's ideology and the "humanism" of legal ideology, the law being the

point at which the two are joined as a pair. The "economism", in the sense of *the concept of the economic on which economism is based,* is not questioned at all by Althusser. As I shall argue in this paper, Althusser retains the bourgeois conception of production at the core of his version of marxism. The implication of Althusser's critique is that his objection is to the *reductionism* of both economism and humanism, and not to the concept of production on which they are based. This is the sense in which he regards "historicism" as the foundation of both "economism" and "humanism". These two deviations are based on the illegitimate generalisation of their specific orientations to society of the lawyer and the capitalist. This is, correspondingly, why the focus of Althusser's interpretation of Marx is the nature of the marxist totality, for he is seeking a non-reductionist concept of the whole as a structured combination of elements which can, in a sense, *reconcile* "humanism" and "economism". The error of stalinism is not, therefore, founded in its conception of production, but in its conception of the totality, not in its understanding of the economic, but in its attempt to reduce the "relative autonomy" of other "instances" of the whole. Althusser is trying to develop a non-metaphysical conception of the whole in which the bourgeois (metaphysical) concept of production can continue to find a place.

It is not surprising that Althusser is unable to provide a theoretical critique of the "economism-humanism couple", for in the course of his critique he rejects as "ideological" precisely the theory which Marx developed to provide this critique, the theory of commodity fetishism. The couple is not constituted at the level of the law, on the basis of the complementarity of the capitalist and the lawyer, but at a much more fundamental level, that of the commodity. The theory of commodity fetishism shows us precisely how, in the exchange of commodities, social relations appear in the form of relations of *subjects* to *things*. To put the point "philosophically":

> Circulation is the movement in which the general alienation appears as general appropriation and general appropriation as general alienation. As much, then, as the whole of this movement appears as a social process, and as much as the individual moments of this movement arise from the conscious will and particular purposes of individuals, so much does the totality of the process appear as an objective interrelation, which arises spontaneously from nature; . . . circulation, because a totality of the social process, is also the first form in which the social relation appears as something independent of the individuals, but not only as, say, in a coin or in exchange value, but extending to the whole of the social movement itself. The social

> relation of individuals to one another as a power over the individuals which has become autonomous... is a necessary result of the fact that the point of departure is not the free social individual.[18]

It is the theory of commodity fetishism that makes it possible to understand the ideological significance of the law, and it is the theory of commodity fetishism that enables us to penetrate the ideological "humanism-economism couple" and so to criticise it by transforming our conception of social relations, and not by simply rearranging them into a new type of whole.

Rancière's critique of Althusser brings out very clearly the *political* significance of Althusser's approach to stalinist economism. Fundamentally Althusser's theoretical relation to economism reproduced the relation of orthodox communism to the politics of stalinism. From the point of view of the orthodox communist parties in the 1960s destalinisation involved a break with the methods of the stalinist period, without a fundamental break with its politics. The "excesses" of the stalinist period found their justification in arguments which rested on reductionism and evolutionism, which made it possible to defend any policy as necessary means to an inevitable end. Destalinisation involved an abandonment of the reductionist evolutionism of stalinism, so making it legitimate to question the means employed (and this is precisely how Althusser poses the question in his *Reply to John Lewis* — stalinism involved the adoption of unjustified means in pursuit of unquestionable ends). This limited freedom of manoeuvre, however, could not throw into question the authority of the party and the inevitability of socialism. Althusserianism offered the party one means of defending its position, by justifying the authority of the party on the basis of its scientific understanding of the "conjuncture" rather than its privileged relation to an inevitable future, and by basing the inevitability of socialism on political and not "economic" factors and so dissociating the coming revolution from the crisis of capitalism. This latter dissociation of economic from political struggle and of economic from political crisis must prove very attractive for a party which is seeking precisely to retain control of growing working-class militancy on the shop floor and to establish its political moderation in a period of capitalist crisis.[19]

It would be absurd to reduce the appeal of Althusser's work to a narrow concern of the leadership of the French Communist Party. The major appeal of Althusserianism has been to young intellectuals, particularly in academic institutions, most of whom have no affiliation with the Communist Party, and most of whom would no doubt seek to dissociate Althusser's politics from his theoretical "achievements". We therefore have to understand the

basis of the appeal of Althusserianism to these intellectuals. Certainly it has a superficial appeal in responding to the most outrageous aspects of stalinist dogmatism, in having a superficially advanced and sophisticated character, in offering a central place in the revolutionary process to the intellectual, while devaluing those ("economic") working-class struggles from which the intellectual is excluded, and in having a rhetorical "ultra-leftist" dimension in asserting the ubiquity of a "class struggle" which is related only in the "last instance" to the "economic struggle". However, it is difficult not to believe that serious marxists would feel distinctly uneasy that the deeper appeal of Althusserianism is not to their political, but to their bourgeois intellectual instincts. On the one hand, Althusserianism rigorously reproduces both the division into academic "disciplines" and the relations of authority of the bourgeois academic institution. On the other hand, Althusserianism rigorously reproduces the familiar doctrines of bourgeois sociology and philosophy, and in particular the dominant forms of each, structural-functionalism and neo-positivism. The reasons for this convergence are not hard to find, for bourgeois sociology is based precisely on the rejection of the "evolutionist economism" of marxism, and so is preoccupied with the articulation of the levels of a complex whole, while bourgeois philosophy is based on the rejection of the "historicism" of marxism, and so is preoccupied with the eternal status of scientific truths. (I am not *reducing* sociology and philosophy to their central ideological preoccupations. It is *in so far as* these are their concerns that they are *bourgeois*.)

Bourgeois sociology follows classical political economy in being based on a conception of production as a technical process which underpins the eternisation of capitalist relations of production and so characterises this sociology rigorously as a form of bourgeois ideology. Contemporary structural functionalism, like Althusserianism, rejects a crude technological determinism. It follows classical political economy in basing itself on the *distinction between the technical relations combining factors in material production and social relations of distribution, constituted by ownership of the means of production, which are mapped on to the relations of production.* The former cannot, however, be reduced to the latter, for they involve the relation of "ownership" which is defined politically and/or ideologically. Social relations cannot therefore be reduced to technical relations. The starting point of sociology cannot therefore be the "economy", the relations of production, for this only exists within society. The starting point can only be the pre-given whole, "society". On this basis structural-functionalism defines a variety of different levels

according to the functions they fulfil in relation to the whole. The identity of functions and levels varies from one account to another, but the basic principle is unchanged. The differentiation of functions determines that each level should have its own specificity and its own autonomy relative to other levels. The different functions are hierarchically ordered, the technical requirements of material production normally being primary because of the supposed primary requisite of physical reproduction. The hierarchy takes the form of limits imposed by one level on the variation of other levels. Within these limits of variation the different levels are themselves structured under the dominance of their relative functions in the whole, and not under the dominance of other levels. They are therefore determined as levels of the complex whole, and not as expressions of other levels.[20]

Bourgeois philosophy rests on similar ideological foundations. I have already noted the historical foundation of the subject-object relation in commodity fetishism. More specifically, with its secularisation, philosophy acquires the primary role of defender of the scientific claims of bourgeois ideology (that is to say, of guarantor of those "truths" of bourgeois science which are "held to be self-evident" and so which cannot be established by those sciences themselves). The contemplative character of bourgeois science, which is based on the bourgeois separation of mental from manual labour, becomes the basis on which the authority of science is established ideologically. The historical character of the concepts of science is systematically effaced and they are given an eternal reality of their own. Hence the bourgeois philosophy of science is focused precisely on legitimating the supposedly universal character of historical categories and of giving particular truths an eternal status. This is as much the case with nominalism or conventionalism, for which no reality corresponds to the categories of science, as it is with positivism, for the categories whose validity is relative remain themselves equally, or even *more* securely, absolute. Hence bourgeois philosophy is admirably suited to Althusser's task, which is precisely to establish the authority of his own version of science.[21]

In other disciplines, as I shall indicate in passing in this paper, Althusser reproduces the most avant-garde positions of bourgeois ideology. In this paper I shall concentrate on Althusser's theory of society, since others have discussed his philosophy at length. The importance of Althusser in other fields should not, however, be ignored. In particular, in political science Althusserianism, as interpreted by Poulantzas, offers a marked convergence with the approach of systems theory.[22] In the study of cultural phenomena

Althusserianism legitimates the most avant-garde forms of neo-Freudianism, in terms of the supposed *univeral* function of ideology, the "interpellation of the subject".

This reproduction of the most avant-garde theoretical positions of the contemporary bourgeois social sciences must go a long way to explaining the appeal of Althusserianism to young intellectuals, for many of the latter come to marxism in response to the inability of the bourgeois disciplines to cope with the radicalisation of the intellectuals which has underlain the contemporary "crises" in those disciplines. It is easy for Althusserianism to capture these intellectuals, for it offers an easy familiarity embedded in a radical rhetoric which claims familiar themes for marxism. This is the great danger which Althusserianism poses, for it is also characterised by the same dead-ends, and the same empty circles as the theories that have been rejected. If Althusserianism is taken for marxism, the responses of many will be a rejection of marxism along with bourgeois theories, and a turn to the more congenial familiarity of empiricism. If marxism is to capitalise on the "crises" in the social sciences it is essential that Althusserian marxism be revealed for what it is — a superficially radical rhetoric within which the discredited doctrines of the bourgeoisie find their last (latest?) resting place.[23]

In this paper I shall look at Althusser's most important works, *For Marx* and *Reading Capital,* in order to establish that Althusser's work is consistently underpinned by a conception of the relations of production which is, in the strict sense, bourgeois. As a result of this Althusserianism reproduces the arguments of bourgeois ideology. My critical comments on Althusser will largely be directed to establishing this connection between the conception of production and the reproduction of bourgeois sociological and philosophical positions, and with showing schematically that the marxist concept of production, developed in Marx's critique of classical political economy, has quite different implications for the theory of society and for philosophy. Limitations of space dictate that the latter arguments are necessarily only indicative. In the last analysis it is not my formulation of Marx's critique of political economy that I would like to counterpose to Althusserianism, but that of Marx himself. This critique was the quite self-conscious product of ten years of work in which Marx knew precisely what he was doing. Its recovery does not require a "symptomatic" reading, but a naïve one, a reading which pays attention to what Marx says, *and what Marx says he is saying,* without reading Marx through the grid of bourgeois ideology. If "marxists" would only read Marx, and particularly Marx's critique of political economy in *Capital* and in

Theories of Surplus Value, forgetting about his "absences" and "silences" until they have mastered the clear and insistent arguments that are *present* in his work, Althusserianism would become no more than a bad memory.[24]

In looking at *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* I shall show how the attempt to establish the autonomy of theory leads to a bourgeois interpretation of Marx. *For Marx* reproduces the anti-reductionist arguments of bourgeois sociology, *Reading Capital* reproduces the anti-historicist arguments of bourgeois philosophy, before attempting to "dehistoricise" the stalinist concept of the mode of production. I shall begin with a brief look at the displaced anticipation of future positions in Althusser's essay on Montesquieu.

The project defined

In retrospect we can already see Althusser's project at work in his essay on Montesquieu. This essay broaches the subject of Marx's dialectic obliquely, by attributing to Montesquieu himself the discoveries which are later seen as marking Marx's scientific revolution. In this essay we learn that Montesquieu did not have a circular expressive totality, but a totality in which there was determination in the last instance by the "principle", but in which the reverse effectivity of the "nature" on the "principle" was possible within certain limits.[25] This conception is then compared to that of Marx: "In both cases it is a matter of a unity which may be harmonious or contradictory, in both cases this determination does nevertheless cede to the determined element a whole region of effectivity, but subordinate effectivity." This essay also discovers a way of breaking with historicism that was later adopted by Balibar in *Reading Capital.* The unity of nature and principle of the state may be either adequate or contradictory. In the latter case the state form will change. Hence we have a dynamic but non-teleological totality.[26]

This essay leads us already to question the marxist character of Althusser's most fundamental concepts, when he can find these concepts in the work of the *mechanical materialist* Montesquieu. The concept of determination in the last instance is particularly illuminated by this essay, for it is clearly given a mechanical interpretation here: the last instance limits the free variation of the other instances, but within these limits it has no privileged effectivity. The last instance is therefore seen in essence as an *external* restriction on the range of possible forms, but in no way as determining within this range. Thus the concept of "relative autonomy", as autonomy within limits, is already prefigured in this essay. The essay strikingly confirms Rancière's argument that Althusser assimilates Marx to mechanical materialism.

We can deal very briefly with the first two essays in *For Marx* which mark the tentative and exploratory beginnings of Althusser's return to Marx. The first essay introduces the discussion by noting the Feuerbachian problematic embedded in Marx's early works.[27] The second essay, "On the Young Marx", explicitly attacks the economistic foundation of stalinism for the first time. However, the attack is focused on modes of understanding Marx's work, rather than on Marx's work itself. The essay introduces the concepts of the "problematic" and the "epistemological break".

The essay attacks "historicist" interpretations of Marx's work, introducing a caricature of Hegel as a surrogate for "economism", and affirms the scientific character of Marx's work as well as the political need to return to that work. However, the project is defined in terms of the renunciation of ideological problematics in favour of a return to reality: it is the *idealist* character of the historicist interpretation which is challenged here, in its belief in the coherence of the world of ideology. This idealist historicism is criticised in terms of a materialist historicism, a logic of the irruption of real history in ideology itself: according to Althusser Marx did not change problematics, but broke with ideological problematics as such, to found science directly on an encounter with reality.[28]

This formulation may be closer to Marx than later versions, but it was inadequate for Althusser's purposes for several reasons. First, the historicist conception of ideology will always threaten to swamp a positivist conception of science and so threaten the autonomy and the integrity of theory because there is no way of *guaranteeing* the break with ideology, and so history, in any particular case. Secondly, the conception of science, which comes "within a hairsbreadth of 'positivism'",[29] leaves no place for the philosopher to play an independent role as theoretically (later politically) informed arbiter of scientificity. Thirdly, the mode of attack on stalinism, which is to reduce stalinism to "historicism" and to assimilate "historicism" to "Hegel", dictates that Althusser complete the elimination of "historicism" from his interpretation. These preoccupations soon come to prevail in the Althusserian interpretation of Marx.

In the essay "Contradiction and Overdetermination" Althusser develops his attack on economism, now coming into the open and attacking the vulgar notion of history as the simple expression of the basic contradiction between forces and relations of production. This latter notion is assimilated to Hegel through the concept of inversion, so that the essay focuses on the relations between Marx's and Hegel's dialectics, the problem being that of

the specificity of the marxist dialectic. Althusser's basic argument is that if Marx had simply inverted the Hegelian dialectic, he would have remained within the ideological problematic of Hegelian philosophy.[30]

The specific properties of Marx's concept of dialectic are expressed in the concept of overdetermination. The Russian revolution did not take place because in Russia the contradiction between forces and relations of production had reached its highest point of development, but because of an "accumulation of circumstances and currents" which "*fuse* into a ruptural unity", making it possible for the general contradiction...to become *active* in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle". The contradiction is therefore very complex, this complexity being expressed in the concept of overdetermination:

> The *unity they* [the accumulation of "contradictions", "circumstances", "currents"] *constitute* in this "fusion" into a revolutionary rupture, *is constituted by their own essence and effectivity,* by what they are, and according to the specific modalities of their action. In *constituting* this *unity,* they *reconstitute* and complete their basic animating unity, but at the same time they also bring out its *nature:* the "contradiction" is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal *conditions* of existence, and even from the *instances* it governs; it is radically *affected by them,* determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various *levels* and *instances* of the social formation it animates; it might be called *overdetermined in its principle.*[31]

Returning to Marx, Althusser argues that Marx does not simply invert Hegel's dialectic, but changes both its terms and its relations. The terms civil society and state are replaced by the ideas of mode of production, social class and state. Instead of a dialectic in which the superstructure is an expression of the structure, Althusser introduces the notions of "determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production" and "the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity."

This essay is of central importance in establishing the framework within which discussion of the marxist dialectic will take place. It is therefore essential to isolate the basis of the critique of stalinism in play here. It is worth pointing out initially that it is not based on any examination of the works of Marx or of Lenin. It is rather based on the observation that many different "circumstances" and "currents", sometimes referred to as "contradictions", were in play in the Russian revolution, and that these currents and circumstances cannot be *reduced* to the status of *expressions* of a basic contradiction. The problem is therefore that

of the relation of the "contradictions" in play in a "current situation" to the basic contradiction. Economism is unable to explain the object with which Althusser has confronted it, so an alternative conception of the dialectic is called for.

The power of Althusser's argument hangs on the appropriateness of the problem he poses. This problem is not a theoretical problem: the series of currents each with its own essence and effectivity is presented to theory as a given, not itself subject to a critical examination which is reserved for the concept of the dialectic. The explanation of the revolution is already given. Russia was the weakest link because "it had accumulated the largest sum of historical contradictions then possible." This sum is explained by the fundamental contradiction of being "the most backward and the most advanced nation", which in turn alludes to the fact that Russia was "pregnant with two revolutions."[33] Russia's revolutionary situation is therefore explained ultimately by her revolutionary situation — the perfect circle of empiricism.

The explanation of the Russian revolution is not in question. We already know all the complex factors which act as "effective determinations". As marxists we also know that "of course the basic contradiction dominating the period... is active in all these 'contradictions' and even in their 'fusion'".[34] The problem is to reconcile the two theoretically. But if the "effective determinations" are known independently of the dialectic, this dialectic can be no more than an empty rhetoric, a declaration of faith in the universal, but invisible, power of the marxist dialectic. For Althusser the account of the "effective determinations" is the given to which the dialectic must be moulded. The concept of overdetermination is therefore counterposed to the concept of expression on the basis of the principle of the irreducibility of the "real" (i.e. the world of appearances). Where does this principle come from? Far from being a marxist principle, it is the cardinal principle of bourgeois empiricism. In effect this principle asserts that the world is as it appears in bourgeois ideology, so that the object is already given in that ideology. Marx asserts that *the world cannot be identified with this appearance, and so to understand the world is to offer a critique of its forms of appearance, forms expressed in the categories of bourgeois ideology.* Althusser's objection to economism reproduces the objection of bourgeois empiricism and not that of marxism.

In view of Althusser's arguments that marxism is not an empiricism it is important to be very clear what is meant here by *bourgeois* empiricism. The error of bourgeois empiricism is not, as Althusser would have us believe, that it seeks knowledge of reality. For most people this is not "empiricism", for it is virtually a

tautology: the concept of knowledge implies a reality that is known (even if that reality is spiritual). The error of bourgeois empiricism is that it mistakes its own ideological preconceptions for reality, thus it gives us knowledge only of its ideological preconceptions: instead of taking reality for its object, it takes its given object for the real. For Marx, therefore, what appears at first as the "real" is reducible, not because Marx is a metaphysician who wants to find ideal essences beneath reality, that are in some sense more real than reality, but because the appearances must be subjected to critical examination to discover whether or not they accord with reality. Thus the error of bourgeois empiricism is that it is insufficiently critical of its own preconceptions. Marx does not counterpose his own privileged vision of reality to the mystical illusions of bougeois ideology, he counterposes the concept of the critique to the concept of the given, so it is through a critique of the preconceptions of bourgeois ideology that Marx arrives at a more adequate basis for knowledge, and more adequate can only mean more adequate *to reality*. Bourgeois ideology is not merely a particular point of view, it is a point of view that is *false*.[35]

Althusser does not question the fundamental concepts of stalinism, and in particular the economist conception of production which underlies its conception of the contradiction between forces and relations of production as the *precondition* of history. He rather seeks to develop an alternative concept of the whole which will relate the economistic "relations of production" to history in a *non-reductionist* manner. Thus this critique focuses not on the concept of production, but on the question of the *"complexity"* of a whole which both is and is not subject to determination by the economic. The "complexity" of this whole expresses the contradictory requirements imposed on it.

Althusser's critique of economism calls to mind the alternative approaches to Ricardianism of Marx and of vulgar economy. Ricardo's theory of value led him into a contradiction, for he sought to identify the forms of surplus value (profit and rent) immediately with surplus value itself, despite the fact that the two contradicted one another. Vulgar economy responded to Ricardo's "reductionism" by abandoning any attempt to develop the critique of immediate appearances, and so abandoned Ricardo's theory of value. Marx, on the other hand, offered a *critique* of Ricardianism's metaphysical concept of value, making value a social, historical, phenomenon, and rigorously relating the forms of appearance of surplus value to surplus value as *transformed forms,* founding the contradictory relation between the two in the development of the contradiction inherent in the commodity itself. Althusser, faced with the contradictions of

economism, follows vulgar economy in making the appearance the measure of all things, and so in effectively abandoning the law of value, which is the specifically capitalist form of the contradiction between forces and relations of production, by abandoning it to the last instance which never comes, instead of subjecting the metaphysical dogmatist formulation of the law to a marxist critique.[36]

The point can be made by looking not at a superficial account of 1917, but looking at the specific features of leninism in that context. Lenin did not have the problem of discovering a formulation of the dialectic sufficiently "sophisticated" to relate an accumulation of already given "contradictions" to a fundamental contradiction. Lenin's problem was precisely the opposite, it was the problem of locating, in all their complexity, the conflicting social forces in play in Russia in 1917. The essential conflicts and their interrelations were not immediately apparent, but were only located on the basis of a rigorous marxist analysis which started from the fundamental contradiction introduced by the mode of domination of capital over Russian society. It was this analysis which enabled Lenin to locate the fundamental class divisions in Russia, most notably in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and in *Imperialism,* and to locate the relation between the resulting conflicts, expressed in the objective (because founded in the relations of production) unity of the slogan "Bread, Peace and Land". Far from taking the "currents" and "circumstances" as given, Lenin subjected them to a rigorous examination. It was only *to the extent that* the Bolshevik Party located the fundamental cleavages in Russian society as *different forms* of the same fundamental contradictiton that the "ruptural unity" created by the Bolsheviks was an objective rather than an opportunistic unity. Lenin's marxism consists not only in his faith in an ability to *create* a unity from the given currents and circumstances, but also in his understanding that a successful socialist revolution depends on the *objective foundation* of such a unity.

The next essay, "On the Materialist Dialectic", seeks to give some substance to the claims of "Contradiction and Overdetermination" while at the same time responding to criticism by seeking to establish the autonomy of theory. This dual aim makes the essay confusing.

The essay starts with a conception of the "social formation" as being composed of a series of levels, the levels being defined as practices. The determinant practice is "material production". Practice itself is defined as "any process of *transformation* of a determinate given raw material into a determinate *product,* a

transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of 'production'). In any practice thus conceived, the *determinant* moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilising the means".[37]

The discussion of this conception of the social formation is actually centred on one pivotal practice, namely theoretical practice. Within theoretical practice "Theory" is central: the "Theory of practice in general", "in which is theoretically expressed the essence of theoretical practice in general, through it the essence of practice, and through it the essence of transformations, of the 'development' of things in general". Theory is the guardian of orthodoxy in both theoretical and political practice.[38]

Having established the centrality of Theory, Althusser proceeds to establish its autonomy. This is achieved by insisting that the determinant moment of theoretical practice is the means of theoretical labour — "'theory' and method", so that theoretical practice is not dominated by either its raw material or its product.[39] Altusser further insists that the structure of practices within which theoretical practice is inserted is complex, bringing us back to the overdetermined complex whole. Althusser tells us no more about this whole, beyond the denial that his is a pluralist conception since the unity of the whole is not sacrificed. It is simply that the unity is "the *unity of the complexity itself*", which sounds very like the contingent unity of the world of appearances. This unity also, we are assured, implies domination: *"the complex whole has the unity of a structure articulated in dominance"*.[40]

The originality of this essay lies in its introduction of a particular concept of "practice" as a central concept of marxism. The concept is not, however, introduced on the basis on a reading of Marx, *but quite explicitly in order to establish the autonomy of "theoretical practice"*. The reason for this is also clear —the essay in question is a response to criticism from within the PCF. The response to criticism is not a defence of positions taken, but a defence of the autonomy of theory.

This small fact is of enormous significance for understanding Althusser's marxism, for it is from this pragmatic origin that a completely new version of Marx is developed to provide the outer defences of the autonomy of theory. This version of Marx does not derive from a "*reading*" of Marx at all, but from the need to invent a Marx who can defend the isolation, autonomy, and authority, of theoretical activity. The link between the two is provided by the

concept of *practice,* and the link is plain in this essay, for the interpretation of Marx is proposed very clearly on the basis of a discussion of "theoretical practice". In order to establish the autonomy of theory Althusser introduces a conception of practice in which practice is defined as *concrete practical activity,* which involves the *abstraction of this practical activity from the social relations in which it is inserted,* so that it becomes trivially the case that any and every practice in Althusser's sense is autonomous, for the connection between practices has been dissolved. Hence the apparently very concrete concept of practice offered by Althusser is in fact an ideological abstraction, for it abstracts from the social relations within which any practice must exist. In generalising this result to all other practices, Althusser generalises the ideological conception of production, and the associated conception of society, which is implicit within it: the conception of production as a concrete practical activity independent of the social relations within which it is inserted. In adopting the liberal defence of the autonomy of science, Althusser adopts the liberal view of society which accompanies it.[41]

The obviousness of the centrality in marxism of the concept of practice, as defined by Althusser, does not bear very close examination. This can be brought out most clearly if we look at what Althusser calls "material" production. The application of the general concept of practice to the practice of material production gives us a definition of the labour process in which men work up nature with means of production. In this process the labour of transformation is first said to be the determinant moment, but we soon find that we have to "abstract from men in the means of production", so that it is the means of labour which are determinant.[42] This claim is asserted with respect to theoretical practice, and generalised to other practices. The term "determinant" is given no content, for we are never told *what* is determined by the means of labour. Far from being obvious that the labour process is determined by the means of labour, this is in general not the case, but is rather *a specific historical achievement of the capitalist mode of production.* In other modes the labour process is "determined" by labour, and not by the means of labour. In capitalist society the labour process is determined by capital and the domination of the means of labour is one form of this determination.[43]

It is impossible to conceptualise this in the Althusserian framework, for the reduction of production to the labour process as a process of production of use-values *implies the exclusion from society of the capitalist,* who is conspicuous by his absence from the labour process, *and so of the fundamental relation of production of*

capitalist society. In the obviousness of the bourgeois concept of practice there is no room for the relations of production, so that the process of production comes to be seen as a purely technical process. The identification of the dominance of capital with some supposedly natural domination by the means of production, inscribed in the "essence of practice in general", implies the eternisation of capitalist relations of production, which is precisely why this conception of production is at the base of bourgeois social science.

The domination of Althusser's "marxism" by this bourgeois conception of society extends to his conception of the relation between the various practices which makes up the whole. The social whole comprises four fundamental practices: material production which transforms nature, political practice which transforms social relations, ideological practice which transforms consciousness, and scientific practice which transforms notions into knowledge. The latter three practices are related through their their objects: they represent different modes of appropriation of the "current situation", which can make their differentiation rather difficult at times. Theoretical practice grasps the social whole in thought in order to inform political practice,which can then transform that whole in action. The product of theoretical practice therefore acts as means of production of political practice, whose product in turn provides raw material for theoretical practice. Political practice is therefore the "real *condensation*, the nodal strategic point, in which *is reflected the complex whole* (economic, political and ideological)".[44]

In this whole material production is said to be determinant in the last instance. This is, as least initially, conceived in the mechanical way already identified in the essay on Montesquieu. The ("economic") mode of production dictates, with the force of natural necessity, certain modes of distribution, consumption and exchange, and certain relations between the economic, political and ideological. In other words the (economic) mode of production determines the *limits* of the autonomy of the political and the ideological by imposing certain constraints on the "political and ideological social relations", and by assigning certain functions indispensable to economic production to the political and ideological levels.[45]

In this conception the political and theoretical (whether scientific or ideological) represent the concrete acts in which the social world is practically and mentally appropriated.[46] It is the world of the social actor of sociology. The economic, by contrast, represents the appropriation of nature, the world of material production of the bourgeois economist.[47]

The "determination in the last instance by the economic" turns out to represent simply the bourgeois theory of functional pre-requisites, with the pre-requisites hierarchically ordered, material production and reproduction being the most fundamental. The Althusserian critique of the supposedly planar quality of the Hegelian theoretical space certainly leads us to a structural conception, but it is the conception of the bourgeois social sciences. Althusser's "practice" is simply the desocialised production of the classical political economists, or the ahistorical social action of contemporary sociology. Althusser follows bourgeois social science in divorcing capitalist social relations from their historical foundation and seeks instead to found them in an ahistorical concept of practice, just as political economy gave them an eternal foundation in the nature of production, and sociology in the nature of social action. It is the similarity of *The Structure of Social Action* to the structure of practice that explains the uncanny resemblance of the complex whole structured in dominance to *The Social System.*[48]

The Althusserian conception of the social whole has important political implications. The separation of production, as the realm of necessity, from the "political" and "ideological", or distribution and exchange, as the social realm immediately implies that political intervention in the former is fruitless, while in the latter it is proper and possible. In exactly the same way bourgeois sociology regards production as non-problematic, confining its attention to "reproduction", itself seen in exclusively "social" terms. The "economic" struggle is necessarily defensive, confined by relations of production which it cannot challenge, concerning only the rate of exploitation.[49]

While the capital relation, according to this ideology, cannot be challenged directly, political action can act on and transform the whole. This "over-politicisation" of the theory means that it is always ultimately "historicist", in the sense that in the explanation of history it always has ultimate recourse to the consciousness of a historical subject.[50] This is not a return to the left historicism of the self-conscious class subject. Class consciousness cannot be revolutionary for Althusser since ideology necessarily obscures the character of the social relations which a revolutionary practice must transform.[51] Only a revolutionary scientific theory can guide revolutionary politics, the Party being the means by which theory takes command of proletarian politics. Guided by this theory, the Party can establish the political significance of a particular "current" or "circumstance", can identify it as a "displacement", a "condensation" or a "global condensation" of the fundamental contradiction (rather than a petty-bourgeois adventure). The

revolution must therefore be entrusted to the immense theoretical labour of the scholar-hero, not to the supporting cast of millions, and must wait on the specific "temporality" of theoretical practice. This is precisely the bourgeois materialist conception, characteristic of utopian socialism, which Marx criticised in the third thesis on Feuerbach.

Althusser's "self-criticism", which removes Theory from its pedestal and gives it to the "proletariat", doesn't improve matters for the philosopher alone can extract it from the normal state in which it is contaminated by bourgeois ideology. Thus Althusser argues, against Vico, that history is "even more difficult to understand" than nature "because 'the masses' do not have the same *direct practical* relation with history as they have with nature (in productive work), because they are always separated from history by *the illusion that they understand it . . . between* real history and man there is always a screen, a separation, a *class ideology of history*". Hence marxist science can only be discovered by the philosopher who brings the class struggle into theory, and grasps the class struggle through theory. This is the "contribution of communists to science" (and to the "masses"), and it sounds very like a renewed form of Zhdanovism.[52]

It is fundamentally because Althusser does not question the bourgeois conception of the "economic" that he does not break with economistic politics, for the marxist critique of the bourgeois conception of production transforms the associated conception of politics. If bourgeois relations of production are treated as technical relations, they cannot be challenged politically. The struggle of the working class at the level of production cannot affect the social relations within which production takes place, but can only limit the rate of exploitation. The political struggle is therefore dissociated from the struggle at the point of production, and concerns political and legal measures to transform class relations, which are supposedly constituted by "ownership" of the means of production. The marxist concept of production, by contrast, leads to a quite different understanding of politics. On the one hand, it sees *in social production* the foundation of the reproduction of the capital relation, and so the foundation of resistance to the capital relation. On the other hand, it sees the bourgeois state as a developed form of the capital relation, in the sense that the bourgeois state is seen as a mediated expression of the domination of capital, whose effectiveness is therefore subordinate to the dominant relation of production. A *revolutionary*, as opposed to a purely insurrectionary, politics has therefore to combine the struggle at the point of production with the struggle for state power in such a way that the domination of

capital in all its forms can be overcome. Thus a marxist politics has to overcome in practice the separation of "economics" and "politics" which Marx overcame in theory. And it should go without saying that Marx could only overcome it in theory because the working class was *already* overcoming it in practice.[53]

Marx rediscovered: Reading Capital

Reading Capital seeks to realise the project mapped out in *For Marx* of establishing an "anti- historicist" interpretation of Marx. The project is dominated by the need to defend the autonomy of scientific theoretical practice. It is therefore essential to show that the autonomy of theory was the cornerstone of Marx's work. This is attempted in the first essay of the book.

According to Althusser Marx's epistemological break consisted in his breaking with the empiricist conception of knowledge, defined as the identification of the "real object" and the "object of knowledge", which is also the foundation of "historicism".[54] Once the object of knowledge and the real object have been radically distinguished from one another, of course, it is a simple matter to keep historicism at bay. Althusser's argument is based on the trivial and insignificant observation that theoretical practice is an empirically distinct practice. Hence it is based once again on the principle of the "irreducibility of appearances". Althusser seeks to demonstrate that this radical distinction is found in Marx by distorting quotations from the 1857 Introduction and by insisting that Marx's own theoretical revolution took place entirely within thought. I shall deal with the latter point first.

Marx's epistemological break entailed a transformation of the "problematic" of classical political economy. What was the basis of this transformation, if it was effected purely within thought? The answer is that the new problematic is a mutation of the old, which is already implicit within the latter. The new problematic is produced, therefore, not by Marx, but by the old problematic itself.[55] The Hegelian autogenesis of the concept is replaced by the autogenesis of the problematic as subject of theoretical practice. Instead of the dialectical *development* of the contradiction we have its analytical *elimination*, giving a ruptural, rather than continuous, but no less teleological account of the history of theory.[56] Real and rational are divorced, the former only intervening in the latter in so far as scientific practice is subverted by the intrusion of extra-scientific "interests".[57] Marx freed the problematic of political economy from the intrusion of bourgeois interests, so making possible the autodevelopment of the problematic which had hitherto been blocked. The political implication is clear and intentional: preserve the autonomy of science.[58]

The specific argument is absurd. While it is true that classical political economy is inconsistent, it is not true that this inconsistency determines a particular direction of theoretical development: the same inconsistency led to the replacement of classical political economy not only by marxism, but also by neo-classical economics. There is no sense whatever in which the concept "labour power", nor any of the other fundamental concepts which Marx introduced, is implicit within the classical discourse. The specificity of Marx's concepts in relation to those of the classics *is defined by the transformation of the concept of production* from one in which social relations between classes were superimposed on technical relations between factors to one in which the two constitute a contradictory unity. In the classical conception exploitation concerns the *distribution* of a given product. In Marx's conception exploitation dominates the *production* of that product. In the classical conception there is no contradiction between the technical relations of production and the social relations of distribution, nor is there conflict within production, for production and distribution are separated from one another. In Marx's conception production of use-values is subordinated to the production of social relations, in the capitalist mode of production to the production of *value,* so that there is a contradiction within production, and the forces and relations of production constitute a *contradictory* unity, in the capitalist mode of production the contradictory unity of production as production of *value* and as production of *use-values*. There is no way in which Marx could have arrived at this conception of production had he been confined to speculative thinking, to the world of theory.

Althusser's argument is based on the separation of thought and reality. This leads him to accept without question the basic formulation of the classical problem of knowledge, a formulation in terms of the confrontation of a knowing subject with the object to be known.[59] In the Althusserian variant the subject and object are known as "theoretical practice" and the "concrete-real". The fact that Althusser dissociates his "subject" from the empirical human subject which is its "support" in humanist philosophy does not prevent him from reproducing the bourgeois philosophy of the subject: the history of bourgeois philosophy for the last hundred years has been dominated by the attempt to achieve precisely this dissociation. The fundamental problem which Althusser's philosophy has to face is that of bourgeois philosophy, that of reuniting subject and object, real-concrete and concrete-in-thought. Within such a theoretical field the reunion can only be achieved metaphysically, by God, Nature or the Party. It makes no difference whether this metaphysical philosophy of guarantees is

its own justification (original definition of philosophy) or is endorsed by the Party (revised definition).[60]

This philosophy of knowledge is bourgeois in the strict sense because of its connection with the eternisation of the bourgeois relations of production, which is the defining feature of bourgeois ideology. This eternisation is based on the extraction of these relations of production from historical reality and their fixation as the given presupposition of history. Relations of production are turned into a fixed metaphysical category whose objective foundation is no longer historical but must be established by philosophy as eternal. The bourgeois ideological conception of society therefore calls forth a philosophy whose task is to provide the *a priori* foundation for the fixed, eternal, and so ideal, categories of that ideology, a philosophy which must be analytical rather than dialectical, and based on the radical separation of thought and reality. It is in this sense that we can call such a philosophy a *bourgeois* philosophy. This philosophy will have its variants. A crude reductionism will call forth a crude positivism to justify its claims that the absolute, the technical relations of production, is also real. A more sophisticated theory which takes the "mode of production" of "society" for its starting point must reject such a crude positivism, for the starting point, "society" or the "mode of production" is an abstraction to which no reality corresponds. In either case the relation between the abstract determinations and the concrete as the "concentration of many determinations" is not seen, as it is for Marx, as the *historical* relation between fundamental relations and their historically developed forms, but as the *epistemological* relation between theory and reality. The question of the materialist dialectic in this version of "marxism" has to be settled by philosophical and not by historical investigation because the basic concept of marxism has been plucked out of history and transformed into an eternal category of thought.

Marx rejected the "theoretical field" of the classical philosophy of knowledge, the conception of the relation of men and women to the world in terms of a universal subject-object opposition. Hegel had first shown the way to overcome this opposition, but he did so only formalistically, identifying the two immediately and seeing the objective as the "immanentisation" of the subjective. In putting the Hegelian dialectic on a materialist foundation Marx overcame this opposition in a historical and a materialist way, not dissolving it in thought, but rather establishing the foundation of the opposition in a real historical process in which the subjective and objective moments are dissociated from one another. Specifically, the philosophical opposition of subject and object is

the expression in philosophy of the contrast between the two moments of exchange which develops with the development of commodity relations (cf the quotation from the *Grundrisse* on page 25 above). The theory of commodity fetishism provides the means by which the essential unity of subject and object can be recovered, while at the same time grasping the opposition between the two categories as a specific historical form of appearance of social relations. Marx's conception of the commodity as a "sensuous-supersensuous"[61] unity perfectly captures this characteristic of the social, providing the means to reveal the ideological character of "the problem of knowledge". It is an idealist fiction to imagine that the world can be the direct object of the *contemplation* of some subject, and it is correspondingly an idealist fiction to conceive of ideology or knowledge in terms of a *vision* of the world, whether that of the empirical subject or of the "problematic" which possesses him or her. *The world can only be the direct object of practical engagement in the world, just as the subject can only exist in such engagement. Contemplation can only be the one-sided appropriation of a part of the social practice of a sensuous-supersensuous person,* and so is marked by the character of that social practice. Thus the difference between bourgeois and marxist political economy is essentially a difference between two class practices. However, it is not fundamentally the difference between the criteria of science applied by different classes, nor the difference in class "interests". The difference is between the different practices in which different classes are engaged and from which the notions that form the starting point of theoretical reflection are abstracted. Bourgeois political economy takes as its starting point the notions in which the bourgeoisie thinks its own practice, which are the notions embedded in that practice. Its apologetic character is founded in the trinity formula on which it is based. Marxist political economy, by contrast, reflects on the practical activity of the proletariat under capitalism.[62] Its superiority over bourgeois political economy does not lie in a claim to truth as against falsity, nor in its identification with the "negative moment" of the dialectic of history, nor in its renunciation of the intrusion of class interest, but in its ability to comprehend the class practice of the bourgeoisie as well as that of the proletariat, expressed in its ability to comprehend bourgeois political economy. These are the terms in which Marx conducted his critique of political economy.

In order to establish that Marx renounced Hegelianism in separating the order of reality from the order of knowledge, Althusser takes the unusual step of looking at Marx's work, specifically the 1857 Introduction. This is a strange choice of text,

since it is overwhelmingly, and quite self-consciously, Hegelian in inspiration.[63] Marx is here trying to locate the implications of the materialist critique of the Hegelian dialectic before setting out on the project that would culminate in *Capital*. The text is therefore of exceptional interest, but can hardly be used if one wants to *distance* Marx from Hegel. The importance of the text must be qualified by the observation that it does not represent a reflection on the accomplished marxist dialectic, but rather an "anticipation of results", whose achievement would take another ten years.[64] We should not, therefore, regard this text as a substitute for the actual operation of the marxist dialectic in *Capital*.

Althusser concentrates on the third section of the Introduction. In this section Marx is looking at the consequences of the abandonment of the Hegelian proposition that the real is the product of thought, a proposition based on the *conflation of* thought and reality. In the course of his argument Marx notes that it is a *"tautology"* to say that "the concrete totality is a totality of thoughts, concrete in thought, in fact a product of thinking and comprehending". Hegel's error lies not in this tautological observation, but in his seeing the "concrete in thought" as a "product of the concept which thinks and generates itself outside or above observation and conception" instead of seeing it as a "product, rather, of the working up of observation and conception into concepts". Since Marx has only just noted that the "real concrete" is the point of departure for observation and conception, it is quite clear that Marx does not intend to separate thought and the real, but taxes Hegel with effecting this separation on the basis of a tautology. In the same vein Marx notes that even for speculative thought which does not engage with the real world the subject, society, *rather than the concept*, remains the presupposition. Althusser defends his separation of "thought" and "reality" by picking up these Hegelian "tautologies" and attributing them to Marx.

Althusser also picks up on Marx's discussion of the relationship between the order of categories in the development of the analysis and the order in which they appear historically in order to establish the "anti-historicist" character of Marx's conception of theory. Marx points out Hegel's confusion of "the way in which thought appropriates the concrete" with "the process by which the concrete itself comes into being". This confusion leads Hegel to seek to analyse the relations between the elements of contemporary society in terms of "the historic position of the economic relations in the succession of different forms of society". This identification of the order of appearance of categories with their contemporary relationship is a double error. First, the

order of *historic appearance* of the categories does not correspond to the order of their "*historic position*" (i.e. in which they were "historically decisive"). It is only retrospectively that we can use the abstract categories to understand previous forms of society. Secondly, the development of new relations is not necessarily subordinate to existing relations, but may subordinate the latter and so *transform* the structure of the totality and not simply *develop* it. For example money exists before capital, expressing the "dominant relations of a less developed whole", whereas it subsequently expresses "those subordinate relations of a more developed whole which already had a historic existence before this whole developed in the direction expressed by a more concrete category".

Althusser concludes from this section that "the production process of knowledge takes place entirely within knowledge", despite the fact that the whole section is quite explicitly concerned with the "historical existence" of the categories and not with their theoretical production, arguing not that their order is determined within knowledge, but that it is "determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society".[65]

What Marx criticises in this passage is not Hegel's "historicism", his search for a relation between the historical and theoretical development of the categories. It is the *ideological* character of Hegel's solution, which projects on to history the dialectic of contemporary society, to which he objects because it makes contemporary society into the pinnacle of history: "the so-called historical presentation of development is founded, as a rule, on the fact that the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself, and, since it is only rarely and under quite specific conditions able to criticise itself . . . it always conceives them one-sidedly". It is *because the dialectic is located solely in thought* that Hegel can project the order of categories of contemporary society, which express their relation in contemporary society, on to history.[66]

Hegel's errors which Marx locates in the 1857 Introduction do not derive from his identification of real and ideal, but from the *specifically idealist form* of this identification which leads him to see the dialectic as being located entirely in thought. The form of the dialectic cannot be constructed in theory, but requires a prodigious labour of historical investigation to uncover it. *What Althusser identifies as Marx's breakthrough is precisely what Marx identifies as Hegel's error!* The implictions of the simple "inversion" of Hegel's dialectic, which Althusser derides, are far-reaching. Thus, while the mystical side of Hegel's dialectic was easily identified in principle, its practical criticism was "no trifle".

The extraction of the rational kernel did not consist in discovering a new "abstract and idealist" form, but in divesting the "real content" of any such form, for the materialist dialectic is the "real course of history itself".[67] The form of the dialectic could not be discovered in theory, nor in "history" as the realisation, manifestation or representation (*Darstellung*) of a dialectic which lies *outside* it. It is the elimination of the *idealist foundation* of the Hegelian dialectic that is the immediate basis of the complexity of the marxist dialectic. The first part of the 1857 Introduction makes this clear, arguing that the Hegelian dialectic tends to reduce the complexity of the totality of moments of the process of social production, seeing these moments as unmediated identities. The materialist foundation of the marxist dialectic means that there is no possibility of discovering beneath the mediations of the process a more fundamental identity of its moments.[68] Marxist dialectic thus differs from the Hegelian in that its mediations are real, reality offering a *resistance* to the development of real contradictions which cannot be dissolved in thought but which must be overcome in reality. The Marxian dialectic is thus dissimulated, not in the form of the *presentation* of the Lacanian unconscious, but in the mediated form of *the historical development* of the materialist dialectic.

Elimination of the idealist foundation of the Hegelian dialectic implies the renunciation of the temptation to accomplish purely formal reductions of the complexity of the real. Because Althusser does not understand this, he does not understand the significance of Marx's critique of Ricardo. Ricardo did not simply forget to mention the word "surplus value", he insisted on seeing the forms of surplus value as simple manifestations of surplus value, without realising that these forms contradict the essence they are supposed to express. Marx's response was not to invoke some "relative autonomy" to accommodate this contradiction, but to develop the *concrete mediations through which surplus value makes its appearance* in the forms of profit, interest and rent.

It is precisely to the extent that Hegel's dialectic remains entirely within knowledge that it is a simple, unmediated, idealist dialectic. In setting the dialectic on a materialist foundation *Marx did not simply carry out a formal operation within knowledge, but transformed the relation between knowledge and the real by locating the dialectic in history.* In *Capital,* as the result of intensive historical investigation as well as theoretical elaboration, Marx arrives at the materialist dialectic. In the development of the basic contradiction in the heart of the commodity between use value and value Marx is not describing a formal mechanism occurring within thought. As Engels noted: "As we are not considering here an

abstract process of thought taking place solely in our heads, but a real process which actually took place at some particular time or is still taking place, these contradictions, too, will have developed in practice and will probably have found their solution. We shall trace the nature of this solution and shall discover that it has been brought about by the establishment of a new relation whose two opposite sides we shall now have to develop, and so on". The relation between thought and the real is clear to Marx: "the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought". Marx even warns us against Althusser: "If the life of the subject matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere *a priori* construction".[69] Although rigorously empiricist in Althusser's sense, this couldn't be further from bourgeois empiricism, from the treatment of reality as a planar world of irreducible appearances. It is this bourgeois empiricism which dictates that the categories which are mobilised to explain these appearances can only be located in thought, on the basis that only the appearance is real. The radical separation of thought and reality is therefore the epistemological basis of the doctrine which seeks to translate the appearances of bourgeois society into absolutes, to dehistoricise bourgeois social relations and so give them an eternal character.[70]

Althusser's adoption of this philosophy has more than a hint of *déjà vu*. If the dialectic is torn from its materialist foundation and is relocated in theory, it reverts to the "wholly abstract, 'speculative' form in which Hegel had bequeathed it". In this form "the entire heritage of Hegel was limited to a sheer pattern by the help of which every theme was devised, and to a compilation of words and turns of speech which had no other purpose than to be at hand at the right time where thought and positive knowledge were lacking". This is precisely the dialectic of stalinist diamat. But Althusser does not follow Marx in setting this mystified dialectic on its feet, in reversing the stalinist subordination of "historical" to "dialectical" materialism. He rather sweeps away the dialectic altogether. Engels noted the consequence of this reaction to Hegelianism: "Only when Feuerbach declared speculative conceptions untenable did Hegelianism gradually fall asleep; and it seemed as if the reign of the old metaphysics, with its fixed categories, had begun anew in science.... Hegel fell into oblivion; and there developed the new natural-scientific materialism which is almost indistinguishable theoretically from that of the eighteenth century. . . . The lumbering cart-horse of bourgeois workaday understanding naturally stops dead in confusion before the ditch which separates essence from appearance, cause from

effect; but if one goes gaily hunting over such badly broken ground as that of abstract thinking, one must not ride cart-horses."[71] It is its domination by such a metaphysical materialism, expressed in its articulation in terms of fixed categories, that explains the failure of classical economics. It is only the application of the dialectic taken from Hegel, but set on its feet, that enables Marx and Engels to see these categories not as fixed but as *expressions of processes interacting in a contradictory, historical, totality.* This is the revolutionary *theoretical* significance of Marx's "historicism", it comes from Hegel, and it is suppressed by Althusser.[72] It is not surprising, then, that Althusser cannot understand Marx's true break, that with the *metaphysical materialism* of classical political economy.

Althusser's critique of the Hegelian dialectic is not original. It reproduces that of the revisionism of the Second International, and its ambition is the same: to divorce marxist science from marxist politics. For both, the revolutionary side of the marxist dialectic is eliminated by the separation of science and ideology, of fact and value, on the basis of the Kantian separation of thought and reality, resulting in the claim that marxism is not a "moral" theory. In both cases politics is taken out of the hands of the working class and put into those of the party. It is no coincidence that the neo-positivist philosophy of knowledge espoused by Althusser, whether in "theoreticist" or "politicist" variants, is precisely the modern version of the positivism employed by the earlier revisionists. "The · Hegelian dialectic constitutes the perfidious element in the Marxian doctrine, the snare, the obstacle which bars the path to every logical appreciation of things . . . What Marx and Engels achieved that was great was not achieved thanks to the Hegelian dialectic, but against it."[73] Marx was undoubtedly right to revise one of Hegel's laws of the dialectic: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."[74]

In the second essay of *Reading Capital* Althusser turns back to the specificity of Marx's theoretical discovery. Since many of the main points anticipate Balibar's fuller discussion, I shall deal only briefly with this essay.

Althusser starts with a very lengthy discussion of different conceptions of historical time, reducing "historicism" to the supposedly Hegelian conception of historical time characterised by a homogeneous continuity and contemporaneity. Althusser's conclusions can be briefly stated: the principle of the "irreducibility of the real" dictates that each level of the complex

whole should have its own time, while the conception of knowledge as an autonomous practice dictates that the times cannot be related to a "single continuous reference time" because the complex whole is not a *real object* but *an object of knowledge* in which the relations between the levels are therefore *functional* and not temporal. The final conclusion is that "there is no history in general, but only specific structures of historicity". The argument is trivial and irrelevant, the conclusion depending on the double insulation of the real as irreducible and unknowable. Since there is no way of leaving theory, which knows nothing of time, it is difficult to see how a theory of history of any kind is possible. There is no way of getting from "the 'development of forms' of the concept in knowledge" to "the development of the real categories in concrete history" without encountering a single continuous reference time which readmits the possibility of "history in general".[75]

After much polemicising against "historicism" Althusser eventually comes to pose the central question of his text: "what is the object of *Capital*?" This is discussed in terms of Marx's originality with respect to classical political economy. Althusser takes the definition of political economy found in Lalande's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* as the basis of his discussion.[76] Since this relates essentially to vulgar and not to classical economy the discussion is very confused. Althusser regards the key features of Marx's critique to be his critique of the anthropological conception of human needs and of the "empiricist-positivist" conception of economic facts as in essence measurable. This leads Althusser to interpret the first part of the 1857 Introduction, which establishes the priority of relations of production over those of consumption, distribution and exchange, as a critique of the supposed anthropological basis of classical political economy.

If Althusser were right about Marx's critique of political economy, then Ricardo would have been a marxist. Althusser concedes that Ricardo's economics was based on production, even believes, wrongly, that he "gave every outward sign of recognising" the relations of production, only lacking the word. While Althusser notes that this absence is crucial, he doesn't seem to have any idea why. Ricardo did not ignore the relations of production because he saw them as being constituted by some anthropologically defined needs, but because he saw production in purely technological terms, so leading him to establish class relations at the level of distribution. Nor was Ricardo so naive as to ignore the fact that profit receivers own means of production, or that rent receivers own land. His error was to see the social aspect of relations of production as social relations of distribution

superimposed on an eternal structure of production, and so to see the *production* of surplus value as a natural process, only its *appropriaton* being socially determined. *It is the realisation that production is the production of social relations* and not simply of material products that enables Marx to examine the *form* of value as well as its magnitude, and so to uncover the fundamental contradiction between value and use-value which is the basis of the argument of *Capital*. It is this discovery that capitalist relations are not eternal but *historic*, a discovery which depends on the critique of metaphysical materialism by the dialectic derived from Hegel, that constitutes Marx's "historisation" of classical political economy.[77] In renouncing the Hegelian heritage and returning to metaphysical materialism Althusser proves the point by his inability to separate Marx from Ricardo.

Althusser correctly argues that Marx sees production as being "characterised by two indissociable elements: the *labour process* . . . and the *social relations of production* beneath whose determination this labour process is executed". Having noted the indissociable character of the elements, Althusser goes on to discuss them quite separately! The argument is purely Ricardian: the process of production as a technological process determines certain functions. The "relations of production" assign agents to these functions by distributing these agents in relation to the means of production. The relations of production do not therefore determine the *production* of surplus value under capitalism, but only its *appropriation*.

The two essential features of the labour process, for Althusser, are its material nature, and the dominant role of the means of production in that process. Althusser correctly notes that Marx's insistence on the material character of the labour process, on the importance of use-value to political economy, led him to give proper consideration to the necessity for material reproduction. But he also sees this as the key to the discovery of "the concept of the *economic forms of existence* of these material conditions",[78] the distinction between constant and variable capital. Althusser seems blissfully unaware of the fact that the latter distinction is a *value* relation and not a *physical* relation, and so derives from the (social) relations of production and not from the (technical) nature of the labour process. He shares his ignorance with classical political economy, which could not distinguish fixed and circulating from constant and variable capital precisely because it could not understand the dual nature of production. The capacity for capital expended on labour power to vary has nothing whatever to do with the material features of the labour process,

but depends on the ability of the capitalist to compel the labourer to work beyond the time of necessary labour.

This is not the only example of Althusser's confusion: it is consistent. Thus we find that such a technologistic interpretation also emerges from Althusser's discussion of the supposed dominance of the means of labour over the labour process. This dominance is simply asserted in the wake of a quotation to the effect that the means of labour can be used to indicate "the degree of development of the labourer" and "the social relations in which he labours". It is similarly asserted that "the means of labour determine the typical form of the labour process considered: by establishing the mode of attack on the external nature subject to transformation in economic production, they determine the *mode of production,* the basic category of marxist analysis (in economics and history); at the same time they establish the level of *productivity* of productive labour".

The asserted dominance of the means of labour is central to Althusserianism both in establishing the autonomy of theoretical practice and in founding the domination of capital. It is used in two senses: firstly that of the dominance of the means of labour over labour. However, this dominance, for Marx, is simply the expression within the labour process of the domination of capital over labour, and as such is specific to the labour process under capitalism. Secondly in the sense of the quote above, that the means of labour determines the labour process. In an empirical sense the assertion is trivial: given certain tools only certain operations can be performed. But in the theoretical structure of marxism this is very far from being true. The basic category of marxist analysis is the (historical) concept of the social form of production and not the (technical) concept of the means of labour.

Given Althusser's Ricardian conception of production, it is inevitable that he should also have a Ricardian conception of the relations of production. These are seen as co-determinant of the mode of production. This is not, however, in the marxist *contradictory* unity of forces and relations of production, but in the classical harmony of the "unity of this double unity", *unity of the technically determined relations of production and the socially determined relations of distribution.* The former represents the *distribution of functions,* the latter the *distribution of agents.*[80]

This conception of the "relations of production" makes it very difficult to give any meaning to "determination in the last instance by the economic". The economic cannot be determinant in the first instance because the "relations of production" are fundamentally political or ideological, and not economic relations. This is because Althusser's "relations of production",

like those of classical political economy, are *relations of distribution mapped on to production* by law or custom which assign rights to shares in the product by virtue of the *ownership* of factors. Hence "relations of production" can only be legal or ideological relations, they "*presuppose the existence* of a legal-political and ideological *superstructure* as a condition of their peculiar emphasis". This means that the political or ideological levels are in fact determinant. Althusser tells us that it is the relations of production which establish "the *degree of effectivity* delegated to a certain level of the social totality", but since the "relation of production" is itself constituted by such a level it is difficult to see how this could establish that the economic is determinant in the last instance. In the end Althusser has recourse to a new concept of causality to escape the dilemma: the idea of structural-causality-in - a - complex - whole - structured - in - dominance - in - the - last - instance-by-the-economic. As part of an interdependent whole the economic is an effect of the structure of the whole itself. The causality is therefore one in which the whole is a cause visible only in its effects. It is this invisible whole that is secretly dominated by the economic.[81]

This idea of the complex pre-given whole structured in dominance is not as original as it may sound. Althusser has managed to reproduce the theoretical structure of contemporary bourgeois sociology. This is not surprising as the theoretical foundation of both is the conception of production also found in classical political economy. It is this "absent presence" in the Althusserian discourse that makes it possible for "sophisticated" readers to find a content for its rhetoric. Although the rhetoric is unfamiliar to the sociologist, the content is very well known.

Althusser asks how we can conceptualise the levels of a social formation and their interrelation. The starting point is the "pre-given" whole, the irreducible appearance with which bourgeois sociology begins. The principle of articulation of this whole must be prior to any of the pre-given levels of this whole and is found, in bourgeois sociology, in the idealist fiction of "society", which is a cause visible only in its effects. Scandal is normally avoided by adopting a "nominalist" interpretation of this fiction, which exists only in theory which, of course, must not be confused with the real. This theoretical fiction determines the differentiation of global social functions, the functions being hierarchised into material, social and ideological reproduction on the basis of an "anthropology of needs".[82] The pre-given whole of bourgeois sociology is thus complex, and it is structured in dominance in the last instance by the "economic", or material production. Corresponding to these functions are specific, relatively

autonomous, institutional levels which ensure that the functions in question will be fulfilled. Economic institutions ensure material reproduction by assigning functions to agents through the division of labour. Political institutions assign agents to functions by means of the law of property and contract. Ideological institutions "assure the *bonds* of men with one another in the ensemble of the forms of their existence, the relation of individuals to their tasks fixed by the social structure".[83] The domination of Althusser's "marxism" by the theoretical "problematic" of bourgeois sociology is total. The consequences of ignoring Marx's critique of Ricardo are grave, for Ricardo is not simply a historical figure, he is the very foundation of contemporary bourgeois sociology.

Marx avoids the need to introduce concepts of "overdetermination" and "determination in the last instance" by *transforming the concept of production.* The relations of production are not the expression in production of politically or ideologically constituted relations of distribution. The latter are subordinate to the former. Marx is not so naïve as to believe that relations of production do not presuppose, either empirically or analytically, relations of distribution:

> If it is said that, since production must begin with a certain distribution of the instruments of production, it follows that distribution at least in this sense precedes and forms the presupposition of production, then the reply must be that production does indeed have its determinants and preconditions, which form its moments. At the very beginning these may appear as spontaneous, natural. But by the process of production itself they are transformed from natural into historic determinants. . . . The questions raised above all reduce themselves in the last instance to the role played by general-historical relations in production, and their relation to the movement of history generally. The question evidently belongs within the treatment and investigation of production itself.[84]

The question concerns, therefore, *the primacy of production in the historical development of a differentiated totality.* It has nothing to do with the question of the empirical possibility of production without superstructures, nor with the metaphysical question of the possibility of a concept of production defined without reference to superstructures.[85] *The primacy of production is founded in history and not in the mind, a fact of history, not the condition of its possibility.*

Marx takes production in society as his starting point. In this sense he starts with society as a pre-given whole. But this pre-given whole is the concrete historical anchorage of his analysis, and not its theoretical point of departure. The *theoretical* starting point is production, and the specific differentiation and articulation of

"levels" is developed on the basis of the analysis of production. Marx makes the point in a quote which Althusser uses to establish "overdetermination":

> The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself, and, in turn reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form . . .[86]

In his analysis of this quotation Althusser collapses these two sentences into one in arguing that the text proves "that a certain form of combination of the elements present necessarily implied a certain form of domination and servitude indispensible to the survival of this combination, i.e. a certain *political* configuration (*Gestaltung*) of society". But (*aber*) this is not at all what Marx says. The first sentence (*Satz*) makes no reference to political configuration, but refers rather to the "relationship of rulers and ruled, *as it grows directly out of production itself*", and it is this relationship which reacts back on the economic form of surplus labour extraction. The second sentence is separated from the first by the emphatic "however" and argues that the economic community and its specific political form is founded on "this", the "this" referring to the combination of specific economic form and relation of ruler to ruled which grows out of production as forms of the relation of production.

To argue that economic, political and ideological relations have to be analysed as *historically developed forms of the relations of production* is not to offer an "economist" position. It is to argue that the unity of the different forms of social relation as relations of class exploitation is more fundamental than any separation or specification not only of "political" and "ideological" but also of "economic" relations as distinct forms of the relations of production. If the differentiated forms of appearance of these class relations are taken as they present themselves, as pre-given, "relatively autonomous" levels, any attempt to explain one in terms of another, even "in the last instance" is bound to be reductionist. Marx's analysis reveals, however, that class relations whose immediate foundation is the production of surplus value in the process of production, are not purely "economic", but are in class societies multidimensional power relations which are expressed in particular ideological forms. This is why *Capital* is not simply a work of economics. In it Marx does develop rigorously the economic form of the relations of production, but

he also develops an analysis of the typical ideological form of the capital relation as the basis of his critique of political economy, and he at least indicates the way to develop the political form, as exemplified in the quote above.[87]

Balibar's contribution to *Reading Capital* brings out clearly the connection between the anti-historicist project of that work and the adoption of the bourgeois concept of production. In order to construct an analytical version of Marx the basic concepts must be purged of historicity and founded entirely "within theory". History will then be a construct of the mode of production and not its starting point. [88] Classical political economy and its ideological heir, functionalist sociology, provide precisely the transhistorical foundation on which to construct the concept "mode of production". Balibar bases his concept of the mode of production on a universal, transhistorical conception of production-in-general as the invariant of history. Each specific mode is then a variant combination of the invariant elements and relations which enter this combination, and history the succession of such modes. The concept "mode of production" is thus the basis of the theory of history (as the basis of comparison), and of the science of society (in specifying each mode as a series of articulated practices whose articulation is the object of the science of society).

The elements of the mode of production are the labourer, the means of production and the non-worker. The relations which combine these elements are the relation of real appropriation and the property relation. In the capitalist mode of production "capital is the owner of all the means of production *and* of labour [*sic*], and therefore it is the owner of the entire product", and this is the specifically capitalist form of the property relation. The relation of real appropriation is that designated by Marx as "*the real material appropriation of the means of production by the producer in the labour process . . .*, or simply as the appropriation of nature by man". Initially in Balibar's presentation this relation involves only the labourer and the means of production. However we subsequently find the capitalist intervening as well, the capitalist's control being a "technically indispensable moment of the labour process", so that the relation of real appropriation comes to be defined as *"the direct producer's ability to set to work the means of social production"*. Although Balibar's exposition is hardly clear, it eventually emerges that *the difference between these relations is previously that between the classic relations of distribution and relations of production.* Hence the difference is assimilated to that between supposedly distinct technical and social divisions of labour: the organisation of production and the

organisation of exploitation. The mode of production is the combination of these relations, *"the relationship between these two connections and their interdependence"*.[89]

Balibar develops the obvious anti-historicist implications of the concept at some length in his second chapter.[90] Textual support is given for this position, the texts in question being those of Freud seen through the eyes of Lacan. Unfortunately, however, Balibar has little more of substance to say about the concept itself, and gives us no reason to believe that it is Marx's concept at all. In a section which did not appear in the first edition of *Reading Capital* Balibar informs us, without evidence, that "Marx constantly defines the 'relations of production' . . . by its *kind of ownership* of the means of production, and therefore by the mode of appropriation of the social product which depends on it". This "property" connection must be sharply distinguished from the law of property, we have to look for "the relations of production *behind* the legal forms, or better: behind the secondary unity of production and law". We are not, however, told either how to do this, or what we will find.[91]

The section on the productive forces is no more illuminating. Balibar describes the respective labour processes characteristic of manufacture and modern industry, noting that the former can be characterised by the *"unity of labour-power* [*sic*] *and the means of labour"*, the latter by *"the unity of the means of labour and the object of labour"*.[92] Balibar then concludes that "*as a consequence* of the relationship between the elements of the combination, the natures of those elements themselves are transformed" (my emphasis), although he has merely noted that the two change concomitantly and hasn't even discussed the causation of the change.

Although Balibar adds very little to Althusser's brief comments on the concept of "mode of production", he does raise the question of "determination in the last instance" which Althusser essentially ignored. The argument is terminologically confused. It begins with an extraordinary discussion of fetishism, which even Balibar has subsequently recognised is *"bad"*, which I shall charitably ignore.[93]

Balibar develops the concept of determination in the last instance in relation to the feudal mode of production, basing himself on a quotation from *Capital*, vol. III, in which Marx considers labour rent. In this passage Marx notes that the non-coincidence of necessary and surplus labour in time and space implies that the surplus labour of the direct producer must be extorted by "other than economic pressure". Balibar argues that this is the "characteristic difference between the feudal mode of production and the capitalist mode of production". This

difference in turn derives from "the form of *combination* of the factors of the production process" in the two modes of production. Hence in the capitalist mode of production " the coincidence of *the labour process and the process of producing value*" implies that the "corresponding 'transformed forms' in this social structure, i.e. the forms of the relations between classes, are then *directly economic forms* (profit, rent, wages, interest), which implies notably that *the state does not intervene in them* at this level". (This is the theory of "revenue sources".) On the other hand "in the feudal mode of production there is a *disjunction* between the two processes. . . . Surplus-labour cannot then be extorted by 'other than economic pressure'. . . . Even before we have analysed the 'transformed forms' for themselves, we can conclude that in the feudal mode of production they will not be the transformed forms of the economic base alone, . . . *not directly economic but directly and indissolubly political and economic*". Finally, Balibar reaches a definition of determination in the last instance: *"The economy is determinant in that it determines which of the instances of the structure occupies the determinant place."*[94]

The fundamental error which underlies this account is located in its initial premises, the belief that the defining feature of the feudal mode of production is its domination by the political. A number of points in Balibar's analysis lead us to seek an alternative basis for the differentiation of the social forms of production. Firstly, the passage from *Capital* on which it is based concerns labour rent, the *simplest form* of feudal *ground rent,* and not the feudal "mode of production". In the continuation of the passage Marx discusses other forms of feudal rent in which labour and surplus labour *are* coincident in time and space. None of the passage makes any reference to determination by the political level, but merely to the use of "other than economic pressure". Hence the attempt to explain the supposed domination by the political by reference to the "form of *combination* of the factors of the production process" does not even get off the ground.[95] Secondly, it is worth noting that in the very quotation with which Balibar introduces the discussion Marx refers not to politics but to Catholicism as appearing to play the chief part in the middle ages.[96] Thirdly, as he realises in his "Self-Criticism", Balibar's claim that capitalist relations are directly economic gives the economic an autonomy which would undermine the whole theory of overdetermination.[97] Fourthly, if the economic is not determinant in the first instance, it is difficult to see how a theoretical argument can establish that it is determinant in the last instance without relying on an anthropology of needs which would assert that material reproduction is the prime function of society, an assertion which is

not only theoretically unacceptable, but which is also demonstrably false: in the capitalist mode of production mass starvation is a far less significant barrier to reproduction than the threat of a declining rate of profit.

The belief that the political is dominant/determinant in feudal society is not a marxist belief, but one which bourgeois historians counterpose to marxism. It is a conception which derives very directly from the ideology in which the bourgeois revolution was conducted, an ideology whose most systematic expression is to be found in classical political economy. Although the latter was ahistorical, regarding bourgeois relations of *production* as eternal, it was not so naïve as to believe that capitalism had no prehistory. Its ahistorical character lies precisely in seeing this prehistory as no more than the prehistory *of capitalism*. It does this by contrasting the eternal bourgeois relations of *production* with historically given relations of *distribution*, the latter only coming into harmony with the former with the triumph of capitalism. Hence the pre-capitalist modes are all characterised by political intervention which distorts relations of distribution that would otherwise have arisen spontaneously as capitalist relations on the basis of the eternal structure of production. Political intervention is required because in non-capitalist modes the surplus does not accrue "naturally" to the exploiting classes. The feudal lord is therefore seen as a disfigured capitalist landowner, using his political power to secure not only his land rent, but also the "profit" of the capitalist or "self-employed" petty producer, and even to depress the "wages" of the direct producers.[98] Classical political economy is a very revolutionary doctrine, expressing the alliance between capital, artisan and peasant in its critique of feudal relations of production. The problem with Althusserianism is that it is mixed up with the wrong revolution.[99]

There is no more basis for the claim that the political is determinant in feudal society than for the claim that it is determinant in capitalist society. There is no difference in principle between the two. In every class society relations of exploitation are not simply economic relations between particular individuals, they are class relations in which those individuals relate as members of social classes. Thus the existence and the perpetuation of a class relation is the historical presupposition of particular relations of exploitation, and the perpetuation of class relations in any class society requires a state that will act politically in an attempt to confine members of the exploited class within the boundaries of the dominant class relation. The state is as much a class state in capitalist society as it is in feudal society, and capitalist society, as much as feudal society, requires a class state. Within capitalist

society the state is necessary to preserve the commodity character of labour power, and it has to do this not only in the period of "primitive accumulation", when capitalist social relations are being formed, but also as the fundamental aspect of its everyday operation in capitalist society.[100] It is the commodity character of labour power that defines the class character of the capital relation, and the subordination of the labourers to the wage form involves the intervention of the state. Within feudal society the state is necessary to preserve the dependent character of the labourer, a necessity which is all the more pressing to the extent that land has not been entirely engrossed by the dominant class. Thus the characteristic feudal class relation, the relation of personal dependence, presupposes historically the existence of an authority that is able to impose and to preserve that relation of dependence.[101] Thus neither feudal nor capitalist class relations can be considered in isolation from the class state that is one aspect of those relations.

In order to construct a transhistorical concept of the mode of production Balibar takes as his starting point Marx's definition of the labour process, found in *Capital* but as likely to be encountered in any engineering textbook. From this Balibar derives the elements which enter his concept of the mode of production, although the elements do not exist outside the mode of production, their content being specified by the two relations of the mode of production. Although marxist terms are applied to these relations they are, as I have noted, essentially the classical conceptions of the relations of production determined by the technical requirements of the labour process, and relations of distribution which receive a politico-legal or ideological definition in terms of the distribution of (relation of ownership to) the means of production. If these two relations are to be superimposed on one another as relations which define a single combination they must connect the same elements with one another. This is awkward, since the non-worker who appropriates surplus labour and figures in the relations of distribution does not play any role, as a non-worker, in production itself. Various expedients are adopted to avoid embarrassment: in the capitalist mode of production the capitalist is insinuated into the process of production as a technically indispensable element of the labour process, the element of co-ordination and control. In the Asiatic mode of production the non-worker *appears* to play a part in the labour process as personification of the "higher unity", "the communal conditions of real appropriation".[102] The non-worker is therefore implicitly assigned a place in the labour process as expression of a general requirement of co-operation. This,

however, raises further difficulties, for the non-worker is not a feature of all societies, but only of *class* societies. [103] He cannot therefore appear as a transhistorical element of the invariant *without eternising exploitative social relations.*

Further problems arise in the treatment of the "*labourer* (labour power)",[104] for it is not the same element which enters the forces and relations of production, as is indicated by the parenthesis. *It is precisely its attempt to root relations of distribution in technical features of the labour process that explains the classical failure to distinguish the concept of labour from that of labour power,* and the two are systematically confused in Balibar's treatment. If we define the relation of production in terms of property, then the non-worker owns the means of production and the *labourer* in the slave mode of production, and the means of production and *labour power* (in one phase of the circuit of capital) in the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, the forces of production implicate neither labourer nor labour power, *but concrete labour. The distinction between these totally different concepts is the basis of Marx's critique of political enonomy.* It is only because he saw the capitalist mode of production as a historical phenomenon that he could unravel the confusion of the physical aspect of labour as concrete useful labour and its social aspect, under capital, of value-creating abstract labour. It is no use arguing lamely that the elements have no content until specified in a mode, because this argument is circular and so vacuous. *There is no sense whatever in which labour, labourer and labour power are the same thing,* just as there is no sense in which the non-worker and the form of co-operation are the same thing.

If the two relations of Balibar's combination can only be brought together by eternising exploitative relations of production and by confusing the social and the physical, his characterisation of the relations is also faulty. I shall focus on the concept of relations of production. The relation of production is conceived as a relation of distribution mapped on to the general structure of production, hence as a relation of distribution of means of production, hence as a property relation. This is the orthodox stalinist definition.

"The economic relation of production appears . . . as a relation between three functionally defined terms: owner class/means of production/class of exploited producers."[105] This relation is consistently defined in terms of the legal relation of ownership. The immediate problem this poses is that of disentangling the relation of production from the legal forms in which it appears.[106] This is doubly difficult for the Althusserians. First, because their epistemology demands that the extraction of the non-legal relation

should be effected in theory, hence analytically. If "we are obliged ... to describe it in the peculiar terminology of legal categories" it is difficult to see how this can be done.[107] Secondly, and more fundamentally, because the "relation of production" is simply a relation of distribution mapped on to production by the legal connection of ownership of means of production, it is *only* the latter legal connection that constitutes the relation of production. Hence there is no relation of production other than that defined legally for the Althusserians. This is because they do not ask what is the basis on which the surplus product is *produced,* but rather what is the basis on which the *already produced* surplus product becomes the *property* of the exploiter, a question which is a purely legal question of *title* to shares in the product. Hence Balibar cannot do anything more than to *specify* this legal relation at the level of production. Thus the Althusserians are consistently and necessarily unable to specify any concept of "property relation" that is distinct from the legal relation of ownership.

There is, certainly, a relation between ownership of the means of production and ownership of shares of the product, *but it is the ideological relation constituted, in capitalist society, by the "trinity formula" which ascribes revenues to "factors"*: the capitalist is *entitled to* the surplus product because he has *title to* one of the factors of production. That this formula is indeed ideological can be established even at the level of the isolated process of production. The capitalist cannot own the surplus product *because* he owns the means of production, for the latter are soon used up in production. He owns the surplus because he owns the *whole* product. He owns the whole product because he owns means of production *and* labour power. However, so long as the proletariat is dominated by "bourgeois romantic illusions" about their "human" rights and dignities,[108] it is ideologically more sound that they think of the wage as their share in the product than as the price of their substance.

Marx goes beneath the level of appearances to ask not what is the basis of the property of the exploiter in the surplus product of the direct producer, but rather what is the basis of the *production* of the surplus product by the direct producer? This question *leads us directly to relations of production* and is prior to any questions of relations of distribution and so of legal relations. Having established the basis in production of the expenditure of surplus labour, the question of the appropriation of that surplus labour is relatively trivial. Hence the relation of production is more fundamental than the property relations which express it. To see this it is worth working back from the "trinity formula".

The capitalist owns the surplus product because he owns the

means of production and labour power. But he owns means of production and labour power because he is a capitalist, because he can constantly replace means of production and labour power as they are used up. He is therefore a capitalist *before* he is owner of the means of production. As an *owner* the capitalist is in a *formally symmetrical* position to the labourer, for it is in the market that labourer and capitalist meet as *owners*. The question we have to ask concerns the basis of the *substantive asymmetry* of this encounter: why can the capitalist buy the worker's labour power, while the worker cannot buy the means of production? Why can the labourer be united with the objective conditions of labour only under the domination of capital? The answer lies in the circumstances in which capitalist and labourer enter not production but circulation, the capitalist as owner of *money capital* (not means of production), the worker as owner of nothing but his or her labour power. The capitalist relation of production is, correspondingly, not founded on the relation between labourer and owner of means of production, but on that between free labour and capital, and this is why it cannot be seen as an interpersonal relation. *The relation with which we are concerned is not fundamentally a property relation, but a relation between classes.* This relation is not *defined* by the legal connection of the members of these classes to the elements of the labour process, but by the *modes of participation of the different classes in the total process of social production* (which includes not only production, but also circulation, distribution and consumption).[109]

The basis of this relation in the capitalist mode of production must be sought in the conditions which determine that the capitalist as owner of money confronts the labourer as owner of no more than his labour power. This is not the question of the historical conditions of the capitalist mode of production, but rather of the process within the capitalist mode of production by which the latter *reproduces* its own conditions of existence. In other words the key to the capital relation is not to be found in the isolated process of production, but in the process of *total social reproduction*. Although Balibar recognises that the analysis of reproduction is important, he fails to understand that it is fundamental to the definition of the mode of production itself.[110]

Balibar's separation of production and reproduction is a common one, based on an over hasty reading of *Capital*. In *Capital* Marx does consider the different moments of the circuit of capital independently of one another, in turn, before he looks at the circuit of capital as a whole. It is only when he turns to reproduction in volume one and to the circuit of capital in volume two that Marx ties the argument together and situates the previous

discussion. It is only when he does this that the social form of the capitalist mode of production is revealed, because it is only in the circuit as a whole that the production and reproduction of capital has its rationale. This should be clear if we consider the moments of the circuit separately, for if we do so we are unable to find the fundamental class relation of capitalist society. In the consideration of the commodity form, the moment of circulation considered in isolation, Marx cannot find any class relations, but only relations between free and equal owners of commodities. In the consideration of the production process Marx cannot find class relations either, for here we have only relations between individual capitalists and individual workers. The capitalist process of production is a process of production of capital, only to the extent that it is a process of production of surplus value. Surplus value is the difference between the value expended in variable capital and the value realised in the sale of the product, after deduction of constant capital, and neither of these sums exist if production is considered in isolation. Thus the production of surplus value presupposes the commodity form of the product and of labour power, while the capitalist form of circulation presupposes the production of surplus value: capitalist production and circulation presuppose one another in the unity of the circuit of capital. The circuit of capital describes the series of economic forms taken by capital and labour in the subordination of labour to the production of capital. This series cannot be reduced to one of its forms: the class relation is the unity of forms expressed in the circuit of the reproduction of the capital relation. This unity is expressed in the confrontation of capital with free labour, and the persistence of the capital relation depends on preserving the "free" character of labour, i.e. the commodity form of labour power. In parts VII and VIII of volume one Marx shows how this commodity form is preserved through the permanent dispossession of the worker in the circuit of capital, through the expansion and contraction of the reserve army of labour, and through the use of the law and of force. It is this class relation, i.e. a total social relation, that is the presupposition of the production and accumulation of capital, whose forms are described in the metamorphoses of the circuit of capital. This relation cannot be reduced to the economic forms in which it appears (this is precisely the fetishism of the commodity that inverts the relationship between social relation and economic category), let alone to one of those forms. The basis of capitalist social relations is the commodity form of labour power, and not the capitalist's ownership of the means of production. The latter is only one aspect of one form of capital within its circuit, an aspect which is,

moreover, *technically,* rather than *socially,* necessary for the capitalist to be able to set in motion the labour power which he has purchased, and as such the foundation for the illusions about the technical necessity of capital expressed in the "trinity formula" and destroyed by *Capital.*[111]

Having discussed the relations of production at some length there is little to be said about the Althusserian conception of the forces of production, for it is simply the other side of the coin. It is because the technical division of labour is seen as a set of positions determined by the technology of production, because relations of production are eternised, that the forces/relations distinction is seen in terms of a distinction between technical relations of production and social relations of distribution, expressed in terms of the technical and social division of labour or of the supposedly distinct relations of real appropriation and relations of production. It is because Marx sees the relations of distribution as moments of the relations of production, and sees the latter as indissolubly technical and social, that he had "difficulty" in "clearly thinking the distinction between the two connections".[112] *Anlalytically* we can argue that the technical characteristics of the forces of production impose constraints on the relations within which production takes place, just as *analytically* we can argue that the relations of production impose constraints on the forces which can be brought into play. But this does not mean that we can isolate two sets of relations of production, two divisions of labour, one technical and one social. The distinction between the two is not "a real distinction but simply a *modal distinction,* corresponding to two ways of conceptualising the same process. Technical and social division are two aspects of the *same division.* The functions which ensure the technical reproduction of the process are the same as those which determine its social reproduction".[113] The analysis of *Capital* is founded on the *contradictory unity* of use value and value, not on the harmonious "unity of this double unity". It is small wonder that Balibar's concept of the relation of real appropriation is difficult to decipher. Either he is unable to separate technical and social divisions of labour, or he reduces the relation to a technical characteristic of the labour process.[114]

Having specified the inadequacy of the Althusserian concept of mode of production in relation to the capitalist mode of production, I shall turn briefly to indicate its weakness in relation to pre-capitalist modes. I have already noted in relation to the feudal mode of production the classical bourgeois terms in which Balibar poses the question. We are now able to see the significance of the Ricardian definition of relations of production in terms of

ownership of means of production for the analysis of pre-capitalist modes. This definition is in essence the imposition of the ideological form of the "trinity formula" on pre-capitalist modes of production. Pre-capitalist "relations of production" are, as I have noted, seen as politically imposed relations of distribution. To define these relations of distribution theoretically, in accordance with the trinity formula, it is necessary to seek "factors" to which to attribute the "revenues" of the various classes, revenues which fall to the class by virtue of its "ownership" of the factors. Hence it is necessary to transpose capitalist legal forms, most notably capitalist "ownership", into pre-capitalist modes of production to understand the relations of production of those modes as debased forms of the ideological interpretation of capitalist relations of production.

The application of this analysis to pre-capitalist modes produces (bourgeois) revolutionary conceptions. I have discussed the feudal mode above. The view of other modes also reflects the relation of capital to such modes. Thus the slave-owner of the ancient world is seen as a capitalist farmer-landowner, free of the burden of rent, but whose idyllic world was destroyed by the Barbarian hordes who brought, precisely, feudalism. In Asia the despot exploited his control of governmental functions to divert the surplus to himself by force, a conception which could legitimate colonial exploitation of the more "backward" peoples, and serve as an awful warning to the civilised world of the dangers of absolutism.[116] The development of capitalism, in this conception, can be identified with the march of reason and universality, sweeping away these various artificial barriers so that the social relations already inscribed in the "relation of real appropriation" can assert themselves. The development of capitalism is then seen as an essentially political development.[117]

Marx did not study any but the capitalist mode of production systematically. He has, however, offered us a schematic account in the section of the *Grundrisse* on the "forms which precede capitalist production". While it is true that this section is primarily concerned to distinguish these forms from the capitalist form, it is sufficiently clear that it does not need to be transformed by a "symptomatic" reading.

At first sight this text appears eminently suited to an Althusserian reading since it is centred on the concept of property. However, the term is not used in any juridical sense in this text, but refers to the specific way in which "the worker relates to the objective conditions of his labour". The term "property" is therefore essentially a synonym for the term "mode of production",[118] referring to specific forms of co-operation in total

social production. The property relation in this text is therefore the form of that co-operation which is essential both technically and socially as form of relation to the objective conditions of labour, co-operation which expresses the fact that "the human being is in the most literal sense *zoon politikhon*".[119] It is difficult to distinguish the property relation from the relation of real appropriation, because the two are essentially the same thing, the juridical property relation being simply an expression of the relation of real appropriation.[120] Relations of exploitation emerge on the basis of the latter not as superimposed relations of distribution, but as exploitative forms of co-operation.

Marx's discussion of the pre-capitalist forms of property is aimed precisely at the attempt to establish an "extra-economic" origin of property. In a passage which a symptomatic reading reveals as being aimed at Althusser himself Marx notes:

> What Mr Proudhon calls the *extra-economic* origin of property . . . is the *pre-bourgeois* relation of the individual to the objective conditions of labour . . . Before we analyse this further, one more point: the worthy Proudhon would not only be able to, but would have to, accuse *capital* and *wage labour* — as forms of property — of having an *extra-economic* origin. . . . But the fact that pre-bourgeois history, and each of its phases, also has its own *economy* and an *economic foundation* for its movement, is at bottom only the tautology that human life has since time immemorial rested on production, and, in one way or another, on *social* production, whose relations we call, precisely, economic relations.[121]

The "determination by the economic" which is expressed in Marx's concept of the mode of production does not therefore consist in the attempt to erect pre-bourgeois modes of production on the basis of a bourgeois "economic" foundation. It consists rather in specifying *the forms of the social relations within which production takes place*, in different forms of society. The relations of production on which these various modes of production are based will articulate different forms of exploitation, and correspondingly different relations of distribution. They will be manifested in specific and interdependent economic, ideological and political forms, which must be understood as *historically developed* forms of the relation of production. This emerges very clearly from Marx's notes on the various pre-capitalist forms.[122]

The first form is that in which the individual only relates to the objective conditions through the community. The basis of this mode of production is a particular form of "property" defined, without any reference to its ideological "appearance" or its political "expression", by the mediation of the relation of the individual to the objective conditions of his or her life by the

community. This form of relation "can realise itself in very different ways", from the clan community to various forms of Asiatic, Slavonic and pre-Colombian societies. In the clan community the community *appears* natural or divine presupposition, and each individual conducts himself as co-proprietor. In the Asiatic realisation the community *appears* as a part of a more comprehensive unity embodied in a higher proprietor, so that real communities *appear* only as hereditary possessors.[123] The political *expression* of the community may take a more democratic or despotic form. "In so far as it actually realises itself in labour," this may be through independent family labour or through communal labour. These various ideological, political and economic forms are quite explicitly conceived as the forms in which the communal relation of production is articulated. Of course the analysis is rudimentary, and in particular Marx doesn't pose the question of the relation between the various forms in which the relation of production is expressed and the different forms of that relation. The account provides the starting point, however, which is not the relation of distribution, not the physical labour process, nor the articulated combination of the two, but the social form of production, which is prior to both.

Marx's discussion of the other forms of property is more fragmented, but follows the same lines. The ancient form is seen as a product of the modification of the communal form. Communal and private "property" now coexist. The community is based on the need for collective organisation to defend the land against encroachment by others, and so has a warlike organisation and is based in the town. This means that "membership in the commune remains the presupposition for the appropriation of land and soil . . . a *presupposition* regarded as divine etc." The third, Germanic, form has only vestigial communal property, as "a unification made up of independent subjects, landed proprietors, and not as a unity". The commune does not in fact exist as a state or political body.[124]

In these sketches Marx offers the starting point, if no more, for a marxist theory of modes of production. The starting point, the transhistorical absolute, is not provided by an abstract and empty structure of unspecified elements, but by the "tautology that human life has since time immemorial rested on production, and, in one way or another, on *social* production". The task of the theory of pre-capitalist modes of production is to take this as the starting point and to do what Marx has done for the capitalist mode of production, to specify the "one way or another".[125]

Two points might be raised in immediate objection to this approach, however. The account has made no reference to

exploitation, nor has it made any reference to the forces of production. The former objection is misguided. To start with forms of appropriation of the surplus is to risk implying a teleology in which modes of production are instituted *in order to* effect exploitation.[126] Such an approach is inadequate, for exploitation can only take place within a constituted mode of production, so that modes of production cannot be theorised simply as modes of exploitation. We have already seen that in the case of the capitalist mode of production the condition for capitalist *exploitation* is a specific form of organisation of total social production in which *co-operation* is effected through commodity circulation. The forms of exploitation characteristic of the modes of production discussed here can be analysed in a parallel way. Thus in the Asiatic form exploitation of the community by the despot and/or the priest depends on communal relations of production and on specific forms of ideological and political expression of these relations. Slavery and serfdom, likewise, are "only further developments of the form of property resting on the clan system". Here the worker is excluded from the community, and so "stands in no relation whatsoever to the objective conditions of his labour" but rather "himself appears among the natural conditions of production for a third individual or community". Hence "slavery, bondage, etc. . . . is always secondary, derived, never original, although (it is) a necessary and logical result of property founded on the community and labour in the community".[127]

The question of the forces of production is one which Marx does not adequately cover in these notes. It is clear that the "form of property" is underlain by particular forms of the forces of production. In one sense the form of property corresponds to, "depends partly on . . . the economic conditions in which it [the commune — *S.C.*] relates as proprietor to the land and soil in reality". Thus the differences in forms of property depend on differences in the extent to which "the individual's property can in fact be realised solely through communal labour" (aqueducts in the Asiatic mode, warfare in the ancient).[128] However the extent to which communal labour is possible depends in turn on the presence of communal forms of social organisation. We cannot therefore derive the form of property from the form of the forces of production. Perhaps at last we have come upon the need for structural causality. Perhaps the complexity of Marx's totality lies, as Balibar indeed argues, in "*the relation between these two connections and their interdependence*",[129] even if Balibar misidentifies the connections.

The question of the relationship between forces and relations of production is intimately connected with the question of history, which brings us back to Balibar's text. Having established a structuralist definition of the mode of production in terms of the combination of forces and relations of production the classic structuralist problem of the reconciliation of structure and history appears. The mode of production has to establish some temporal mode of existence.

The concept of reproduction provides an initial means of deriving a temporality from the synchronic structure of the mode of production. But since the forces and relations of production form a harmonious unity, this *dynamics* of the mode of production simply projects the structure into its "eternity" as a constant and unchanging structure.[130] This is illustrated by Balibar's treatment of the concept of contradiction.

The concept of contradiction defines the dynamics of the structure in the sense of the existence of the structure in time. But it is inscribed within the structure, and so cannot be the means by which the suppression of the structure is effected. Contradiction is not, therefore, fundamental, and its resolution does not take the form of transformation of the structure, but of renewed structural equilibrium. The concept of contradiction is therefore the basis of the understanding of the dynamics of the mode of production, which takes the form of stasis, but cannot help to understand its *diachrony,* the transition from one mode of production to another.[131] To explain this Balibar introduces a different sort of mode of production, a "transitional mode", whose dynamic is also a diachrony.

In the capitalist mode of production, according to Balibar, the forces and relations of production "correspond" to one another. The relationship between them is one in which there is a "*reciprocal limitation* of one connection by the other", so that the contradiction between them is non-antagonistic, in the sense just discussed. On the other hand, there are modes such as the manufacturing mode in which the forces and relations are in a state of "non-correspondence" so that we see a *"transformation of one by the effect of the other",* in this case of the forces by the relations, to bring the two back into correspondence in the capitalist mode of production. Reproduction in a transitional mode therefore takes the form of supersession, but as the product of the effect of the relations of production on the forces, and not of the development of contradictions. This sounds suspiciously like a new variant of "historicism", and Balibar seems aware of the danger, suddenly dissolving his transitional mode and announcing it as a combination of modes of production, bringing the analysis

back into the purity of the synchronic but leaving diachrony once more unexplained.[132]

The transitional mode of production brings us back to the concept of the "conjuncture", the current situation, in which it is political practice which takes the whole social formation as its object, and so to the historicism of the class subject which keeps creeping back. In a transitional mode of production the relations of production transform the forces of production. They are able to do this because the "non-economic" levels of the mode of production are no longer limited by the "economic". Their autonomy is unambiguously absolute, for it is political practice "whose result is to *transform* and *fix* the limits of the mode of production".[133] This theory of displacement, drafted in to fill gaping theoretical holes, is given no content. We are simply told that when forces and relations do not "correspond" the political will be dominant and transformation will be possible, but the concept of "correspondence" remains empty. It seems that for Balibar, or for Classical Political Economy, it is only the capitalist and primitive communist modes which are characterised by correspondence, and so are non-transitional.[134]

The concept of the transitional mode does not even formally solve the problem which gave rise to it, for it is still necessary to explain how the transition to the transitional mode is effected. Balibar's "Self-Criticism" provides the means of dealing with diachrony without relapsing into teleology. In his self-criticism Balibar makes three related points. First, he notes that reproduction is not automatic in the capitalist mode of production since it is not, as he had thought, a purely economic matter, but also involves the "superstructure", at least in the reproduction of labour power. This makes it possible for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production to be interrupted.[135] Secondly, he notes that the combination of forces and relations of production cannot be seen simply as a combination of independently constituted sets of relations, as they are in *Reading Capital*, but must be seen as a combination made "*in the* (social) *form and under the influence of the relations of production themselves*".[136] This means that the mode of production can be transformed by a transformation of the relations of production, by political practice. Thirdly, Balibar points out that the object of his text was the concept of the "mode of production", whereas it is social formations which change.[137] This undermines the attempt to offer a general theory of modes of production or a theory of history.

The net result of these three points is that it becomes possible for any mode of production to change, the class struggle taking the relations of production as its object and so transforming the mode

of production. Hence teleology is eliminated only at the expense of reintroducing the class subject of history, and seeing modes of production as creations of such class subjects. We are thus back with a structuralist version of that "left historicism" which is the butt of so much criticism in *Reading Capital.*[138] But the ambition has been achieved, marxist science has been divorced from marxist politics, and so this version of "left historicism" can, paradoxically, be put at the service of revisionism:

> If the effects within the structure of production do not by themselves constitute any challenge to the limits . . . there may be *one of the conditions* (the "material base") of a *different result,* outside the structure of production: it is this other result which Marx suggests marginally in his exposition when he shows that the movement of production produces, by the concentration of production and the growth of the proletariat, one of the conditions of the particular form which the class struggle takes in capitalist society. *But the analysis of this struggle and of the political social relations which it implies is not part of the study of the structure of production.* (Last emphasis is mine.)[139]

The theoretical recourse to a class subject is dictated by the absence of any principle *internal* to the mode of production which can be the basis of an explanation of transition. The concept of class is then introduced as the transcendent principle which, guided by the scientifically attested programme of The Proletarian Party, will create an entirely new structure from the debris of the old.[140] The absence of an internal principle of transition depends on the interpretation of the relationship between forces and relations of production as one of correspondence or non-antagonistic contradiction. Let us examine this thesis a little more closely.

It should not be necessary to point out that such a conception derives from classical political economy and can find no support in Marx's work. It is embarrassing to have to point out to "marxists" that the contradiction between forces and relations of production is antagonistic, since production both reproduces *and suspends* the general conditions of production. The *Preface to the Critique* is not ambiguous: "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution . . ."[141] This is not simply a rash, crude, hasty, misguided, "Hegelian" formulation, but rather is the way in which Marx constantly conceptualises the relation between the forces and relations of production. The whole of *Capital* is no more than

an elaboration of this contradiction in the capitalist mode of production.

In the text on pre-capitalist forms Marx notes, in discussing the ancient mode, that "the presupposition of the survival of the community is the preservation of equality among its free self-sustaining peasants, and their own labour as the condition of the survival of their property".[142] However, reproduction does not simply represent the "general form of permanence"[143] of these general conditions of production, for "the survival of the commune as such in the old mode requires the reproduction of its members in the presupposed objective conditions. Production itself . . . necessarily suspends these conditions little by little . . . and, with that, the communal system declines and falls, together with the property relations on which it was based".[144] The unity of forces and relations of production is thus a contradictory unity of the form of co-operation and its objective conditions. Since production is simply the action of men and women, through determinate relations of production, on the objective conditions of production, it is a tautology to note that the development of economic conditions, within determinant economic relations, will alter the material foundation of the latter, ultimately to condition their replacement by new economic relations consistent with new economic conditions: "The aim of all these communities is survival; i.e. *reproduction of the individuals who compose it as proprietors* . . . This *reproduction, however, is at the same time necessarily new production and destruction of the old form* . . . Thus the preservation of the old community includes the destruction of the conditions on which it rests". Marx concludes that "in the last analysis, their community . . . resolves itself into a specific stage in the development of the productive forces of working subjects — to which correspond their specific relations amongst one another and towards nature. Until a certain point, reproduction. Then turns into dissolution".[144]

Marx's own position is clear and consistent. Two objections might be raised to it, however. Firstly, the last quotation might be interpreted as the basis of a *philosophy of history* in which the productive forces are seen as the autonomous motor of history acting on history from outside. It might be argued that, just as Hegel projected his own society into the past as the end already inscribed in the beginning of history, and Ricardo, more mundanely, founded the eternity of his own society in the technical features of production in general, so Marx inscribes the communist future in both the present and the past through an alternative mechnical materialist philosophy of history. This is not the case for two reasons. First, it is true that Marx appears to

regard it as the historical tendency of every mode of production to develop the forces of production, and he appears to regard modes of production as succeeding one another according to the level of development of the forces of production. However, he does insist on analysing each mode of production as a specific historical phenomenon, characterised by its own particular form of conditions and relations of production. Marx only established the progressive character of the capitalist mode of production so, until and unless this is done for other modes as well, Marx's tentative suggestions must be taken to be speculative and hypothetical. Secondly, this speculative suggestion that history is progressive is not a suggestion that the history of any particular society is progressive. In Hegel's philosophy of history world history, as the progressive self-realisation of the Idea, is dissociated sharply from the history of particular societies, which go into decline once they have played their world-historical role. Marx takes this idea from Hegel, but sets it on a materialist foundation, recognising that it is only with capitalism that world-history makes its appearance, so that it is the expansion of capitalism on a world scale which first defines the historical position of non-capitalist modes of production, and so defines the progressive development of the productive forces as a world-historical phenomenon.

The second objection which might be raised is less serious: it is the objection that Marx's conception of the dialectic of forces and relations of production yields an idealist *theory of history,* because forces and relations of production are seen as generating history of themselves, without any reference to the class struggle, "motor of history". This objection depends on the conception of society in which forces and relations of production are purely economic phenomena, while class struggle, and the history it produces, are purely political. As we have seen, this is far from Marx's conception of the relations of production, according to which these social relations are not technical relations but are the social basis of *both* the "economic community" and "its specific political form". The development of the relations of production, under the impact of changes in the conditions of production, is therefore a development of these relations in their economic, political and ideological forms. In a class society these relations are differentiated class relations, and their development, under the impact of changes in economic conditions, and subject to the constraint of those conditions, is the development of a multi-faceted class struggle. This struggle is not, however, something divorced from production, located in some relatively autonomous political instance, taking the whole social formation as its object. *The class struggle is the form of development of the developed forms*

of the relation of production, an omnipresent economic, political and ideological struggle.[145]

Conclusion: Althusserianism as intellectual counter-insurgency

Althusserianism is based on a polemical technique which can only be described as intellectual terrorism. Three terms, "historicism", "empiricism" and "humanism" are drafted in to sweep away all possible opposition. To be labelled by such a term is to be labelled a class enemy, an intellectual saboteur. The power of the terms, however, depends on the claim that marxism represents a radical break with all forms of "historicism", "empiricism" and "humanism" in the name of science. In this paper I have argued that far from defining marxism, Althusser uses his triple banner to expunge the revolutionary theoretical, philosophical and political content of marxism in favour of bourgeois sociology, idealist philosophy and stalinist politics.

The most fundamental aspect of Althusserianism is its anti-historicism. I have dealt with this question at considerable length in discussing *Reading Capital.* I have argued that Marx rejects not "historicism" but the idealist philosophy of history, found in Hegel and in classical political economy. This philosophy is based on the eternisation of the present and the projection of this eternity into both the future and the past. In this sense such a philosophy of history is ahistorical, for it dissolves real history in favour of the ideal play of concepts. Marx's historicism is a materialist, but dialectical, historicism which counterposes real history to these idealist fantasies, and so which historises the present. Althusserianism takes up not Marx's critique of Hegel but that offered by mechanical materialism, criticising the speculative aspect of Hegelianism, but not its idealism. Althusserianism does this by adopting the position of classical political economy, which offers the mechanical materialist variant of Hegel's philosophy of history, emulating the unfortunate Proudhon. It does not abolish the ideological implications of this conception, but ignores them. They are concealed by the foundering of the Althusserians as they seek to come to terms with history. Having rejected Proudhonism to discover the capitalist mode of production as the terminus of history, they have to choose between the dominance of the forces of production, giving the economism of Meillassoux or Terray, or that of the relations of production, giving the historicism of Balibar (revised), Cutler, or Hindess and Hirst (mark one), or else to abandon all marxist pretensions by abandoning reality altogether (Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain).[146]

Their opposition to Marx's "historicism" leads the Althus-

serians to reject the method of historical materialism which sees the dialectic in thought as the retracing, in thought, of the dialectic in operation in history. This leads them to separate "dialectical" from historical materialism, and to replace the marxist dialectic by the most avant-garde versions of absolute idealism, denying the reality of either subject or object of knowledge in favour of the unique reality of knowledge itself. The abolition of its material foundation returns the dialectic to its mystical form, and so leads to its rejection in favour of an analytical logic. Such a logic is *metaphysical,* in the Hegelian and marxist sense that it takes moments of processes for absolute categories, and so eternises the historic. This analytical philosophy of knowledge is therefore the epistemological foundation for the adoption of the bourgeois conception of capitalist society. "Theory" is content to take bourgeois society as it presents itself, and so to present the forms of bourgeois society as eternal conditions of existence of society. Thus the critique of "empiricism" conceals the truly empiricist foundations of Althusserianism. Its adoption of the most banal forms of appearance of bourgeois society is presented as a process which takes place entirely in theory. When the concepts of that ideology generate in thought the world of appearances we live in from day to day the relation between concrete-in-thought and concrete-real becomes unproblematic. The concepts on which the edifice is based have the obviousness of bourgeois ideology, and so their origin is never questioned. When they generate the ideology from which they were plucked, their adequacy is not questioned either. It is in Althusserianism itself that we find the reflexive structure of ideology, it is Althusserianism which produces the "effect of recognition-misrecognition in a mirror connection".[147]

The third sin in the Althusserian canon is "humanism". In *For Marx* theoretical humanism was a prime target, although ideological humanism could be tolerated. Since *Reading Capital* (or is it since "Prague Spring"?) even ideological humanism has come under attack. The critique of " humanism" is not of major theoretical significance. There can be few marxists who believe that Marx takes the "free social individual"[148] as his point of departure, and few who would disagree that in this sense marxism is based on the idea of the "process without a subject" derived from Hegel.[149] Althusser's attack on humanism is of primarily ideological significance. It is clear that humanism has become a serious political threat to the dominance of orthodox party marxism in the period of the "historic compromise" and the "alliance of the left". Although in this political confrontation humanism could hardly be accused of adopting proletarian political positions, it is not so clear in the *ideological* confrontation

of humanism and orthodox marxism that the former is the bearer of bourgeois, the latter of proletarian, ideology. Indeed Rancière argues at some length that the reverse is the case.

On the one hand, argues Rancière, although there have been bourgeois humanist ideologies, such as that of Feuerbach, humanism is only a peripheral bourgeois ideology.[150] The conception of "man" embodied in the dominant bourgeois ideology is not at all man the subject, but the man whose human nature must be moulded to fit society, the man of eighteenth-century mechanical materialism, "the man of philanthropy, of the humanities and of anthropometry: the man one moulds, helps, surveys, measures". This is precisely the man of classical political economy, the man who must be planned, regulated, governed, instructed by a superior class, the man who underpins the functional interpretation of the class division of society. This bourgeois conception of man persists in the ideologies of Owenism, of radical philanthropy, and even of Marx in *The German Ideology* (and, it might be added, in his and other marxists' conception of women). It is also precisely this bourgeois conception of man which dominates the revisionism of the orthodox communist parties, the conception of the proletariat who must continue to be led, planned, co-ordinated, disciplined and instructed by the superior class of apparatchiks. It is the conception which Althusser adopts, but with which Marx broke definitively in the third thesis on Feuerbach when he asked who educates the educators.

On the other hand, Rancière continues, the same word, "man", whose nature in bourgeois ideology condemns him to servitude, is appropriated by the proletariat as the means of articulating its rejection of this servitude. It is a word which emerges spontaneously time after time, in the practical struggles of the proletariat, as the expression of a revolutionary aspiration, as the locus of the possibility of a different society than that in which bourgeois man is encased. In the context of these struggles the concept of man the subject (and increasingly of woman the subject too) is the practical expression of the revolutionary philosophical concept, the negation of the negation, for it is only in that concept that the aspirations of the oppressed can be given a revolutionary form, looking forward to a possibility which transcends the negation of humanity rather than back to a past which was its precondition. It is not surprising that having followed Stalin's lead in eliminating the negation of the negation from marxism, Althusser can see no need to retain the concept of "man".

It is not only because his own thought is dominated by the *bourgeois* concept of man that Althusser is unable to understand

that the same word can have very different meanings in different practices. It also follows directly from his conception of ideology. For Althusser a word does not derive its meaning from its insertion in a social practice, but rather conceals a concept whose meaning derives from its position in a set of concepts. The word "man" conceals the bourgeois concept of man, and so its intrusion into a proletarian discourse must represent the intrusion of bourgeois ideology (and not simply of sexism). Ideology is embodied in a word, and is to be fought by the theorist who can sift the good from the bad words, draw the "theoretical dividing line between true ideas and false ideas" (cf. note 60). Althusser cannot see that the revolutionary concept of humanity emerges as the expression of a political struggle not against the *word* of bourgeois humanism, but against its *practice*, against the practical tyranny of domination in every institution of bourgeois society of which the bourgeois concept of man is but the ideological expression. He cannot see this because he cannot divorce himself from the sociological conception of ideology as a representation, a distorted vision, an imaginary interpellation of the subject, divorced from the practice of bourgeois domination which is, for Althusser, simply an expression of the technical division of labour.

Althusserian politics is summed up in his reply to John Lewis. The meaning Althusser gives to the slogan "the masses make history" which he counterposes to Lewis's slogan "men make history" is quite the opposite of the Maoist emphasis on the impotence of the bourgeoisie confronted with the collective power of the masses. For Althusser the proletariat must be taught the *omnipotence* of the bourgeoisie:

> When one says to the proletarians that it is men who make history, one doesn't need to be a scholar to understand that sooner or later one will contribute to their disorientation and disarming. One leads them to believe that they are all powerful as men, while disarming them as proletarians in the face of the real omnipotence, that of the bourgeoisie which controls the material (means of production) and political (state) conditions which direct history. When one sings the humanist song to them, one distracts them from the class struggle, one prevents them from giving themselves and using the only power they have: that of *organisation in a class* and of the *organisation of the class*, the unions and the party.[151]

Notes

1. Edward Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, London, 1978. S. Clarke, "Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas's Theory of the State", *Capital and Class*, 2, 1977. S. Clarke, "Capital, Fractions of Capital and the State", *Capital and Class*, 5, 1978. S. Clarke, *The Foundation of Structuralism*, Hassocks, 1980. I should stress that in

writing all these papers I have benefited enormously from discussion with many comrades in Coventry and in various groups of the Conference of Socialist Economists. This work is very much a collective product, even though written by one individual. Thus I am ready to accept full responsibility for its content, but am loathe to accept individually any credit that may be due.

2. N. Geras, "Althusser's Marxism", *New Left Review*, 71, 1972, p. 77n; A. Glucksmann, "A Ventriloquist Structuralism", *New Left Review*, 72, 1972, p. 69. J. Rancière, *La leçon d'Althusser*, Paris, 1974, p. 9.
3. A. Glucksmann, op. cit. Spinoza is Althusser's philosophical inspiration, from whom many central formulations are drawn. Cf. L. Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism* (hereafter ESC), London, 1976, pp. 132-41, 187-92. P. Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London, 1976, pp. 64-5. Anderson also notes the remarkable similarity of many of Althusser's themes to those of Adorno's *Negative Dialectic*, which is based on lectures delivered in Paris in 1961 (ibid., pp. 72-3).
4. Cf. N. Poulantzas, "Vers une théorie marxiste", *Temps Modernes*, May 1966, p. 1978. This penetrating critique precedes Poulantzas's conversion to Althusserianism.
5. M. Dufrenne, "La philosophie du néo-positivisme", *Esprit*, 1967.
6. Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, London, 1968, pp. 312-14.
7. The terms "humanism" and "historicism" are used very loosely by Althusserians. This looseness is fundamental to Althusserianism, whose principal critical weapon is the identification of an opponent as "humanist", "historicist" or both. The terms "empiricist" and "economist" are used more rarely. Brewster offers attested definitions of the terms in his glossary in L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital* (hereafter RC), London, 1970, p. 314.

   The polemical use of these terms is based on establishing the (almost trivially) non-marxist character of certain simplistic formulations which are characterised as "historicist", "humanist", "economist" or "empiricist" and then generalising the application of the terms so that they cover totally different theories. Thus it is not very contentious to argue that marxism is not a historicism in the Hegelian sense of seeing history as the product of the development of the concept, and so seeing knowledge as the self-realisation of history (although it is not clear that some versions of Althusserianism do not come very close to this). The early work of Lukács certainly tended in this direction, with history being interpreted as the product of the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat, and marxism as the self-realisation of that history. This kind of historicism is developed in the stalinist identification of proletarian class consciousness with the party so that the party is both the subject of history and history's self-realisation. The result is the stalinist identification of the political authority of the party with the

scientific authority of marxism. Thus for Stalin the strength of marxism is its scientific character that enables it to predict the course of history and so to guide the party. The authority of the party is therefore based on the scientifically attested truth of its proclamations, a truth that is necessary because history speaks through the party (even where the truth is reversed from year to year). When I refer to stalinist politics in this paper I refer to this attempt to legitimate the authority of the party over its members, and ultimately over the working class, by reference to its superior access to historical truth given to it by the science of which it is the custodian.

The Althusserian polemical technique is to condemn all forms of historicism by condemning one example of historicism. For Althusser the fault of stalinism is its historicism, therefore it is essential to introduce an anti-historicist conception of science, so that the scientist rather than the party becomes the judge of truth. (After the party slapped his wrists Althusser recognised that science could not be insulated in this way and that it was therefore necessary for the party to intervene, through philosophy, to protect the scientist from subversive bourgeois influences: thus Althusser adopts a historicist theory of error but an anti-historicist theory of truth.) Thus Althusser identifies anti-stalinism with anti-historicism. However it is not stalinism's *historicism* that underlies its politics, for a consistent historicism is subversive of stalinism, which is why Lukács was forced to recant. If knowledge is a historical product, rooted in the real world, then neither the party nor science can claim a monopoly of historical truth. Historical truth has to be found in history and in the lives of those who make history, it has to be distilled from the experience of the mass of the working class and is not to be discovered by theoretical practitioners or political manipulators of the concept. It is the *idealism* of stalinist historicism that is at fault, the idealist identification of truth with the party as the ideal expression of history, and it is the mechanical materialist conception of theory as detachable from its history, as having its own authority, and so as being the party's guide, that underlies this idealist historicism. This aspect of stalinism is reinforced by Althusserianism, whether it is the scientist or the party who decides the truth. Thus the Althusserian identification of stalinism with "historicism" and the condemnation of all forms of historicism in fact serves to strengthen the defences of stalinist politics while launching a vicious assault on any attempt to challenge the party's (Theory's) monopoly of truth.

The terms "humanism", "empiricism" and "economism" are submitted to similar polemical distortions. If history cannot provide a basis for opposition to the authority of science and of the party it embodies, nor can the individual, for the individual is also a bourgeois illusion. This radical "anti-humanism" is obtained by generalising the trivial observation that Marx is not a crude utilitarian and justified by reference to Marx's observations about

the dehumanisation wrought by capital. In exactly the same way experience, whether of the individual or of the class, is devalued in the name of "anti-empiricism": the claim that knowledge has nothing to do with experience, but is based on a renunciation of experience as necessarily ideological. This claim is obtained by generalising the trivial observation that Marx was not a Humean empiricist who believed that knowledge could be obtained by mechanical procedures of induction. In this way all possible sources of opposition to the authority of the party's writ are anticipated and denounced as expressions of bourgeois ideology: neither history, not the individual, nor experience, can undermine the authority of knowledge, for the validity of knowledge is guaranteed by its procedures, and its purity is protected by philosophy, the intervention of the class struggle in theory. Needless to add that in the course of this paper I shall stress the "historicist", "humanist" and "empiricist" foundations of marxism.

The last term whose meaning needs to be clarified in this note is "economism". The term "economism" is used by Althusserians in a narrower sense than usual, to refer to tendencies that regard the "economy" as playing a dominant or determinant role. However, in the marxist tradition "economism" has generally referred to a separation of the economic from the political, such as is centrally characteristic of Althusserianism. Thus the economism of the Second International that was challenged by Lenin involved the separation of trade union and political struggle so that the party concerned itself only with "political" matters, while the struggle for the mass of the workers was "purely economic". This separation was based on a particular technicist conception of the economy which saw no need to contest the domination of capital at the point of production and no continuity between "economic" and "political" struggle. It is in this sense that I use the term here.

It should finally be noted that when I use the terms such as "stalinism", "dogmatism", "bourgeois ideology" I try to use them in a precise technical sense and do not use them as terms of abuse (many are still proud to be bourgeois or stalinist). "Stalinism" refers to the interpretation of Marx which became the orthodoxy of the Third International, which has deep roots in the working-class movement but was codified in Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, written for the *History of the CPSU (Revised)*, and which served as the standard of orthodoxy from its publication in 1937. This text is too often ignored by latter-day marxists. It is by no means as unsophisticated as many might think, and it was not transcended by the revelations of the consequences of the kind of politics that flowed from it. It is my argument in this paper that Althusser only manages to break with this interpretation of Marx by abandoning Marx altogether in favour of pluralism. "Dogmatism" refers to a tendency, of which stalinism is one version, that treats marxism as a cosmology and

regards a particular interpretation of that cosmology as canonical. Thus dogmatism leads very directly into what I have already defined as stalinist politics. By "bourgeois ideology" I intend to refer to theories that are based on the denial of the historical, and so relative and mutable, character of bourgeois social relations. This is the *defining* feature of bourgeois ideology.

8. Rancière, op. cit., pp. 58-60. L. Althusser, *For Marx* (hereafter FM), London, 1969, Introduction.
9. FM, pp. 11-13, 233. cf. p. 199 where we find a clear expression of Althusserian opportunism: ideological notions are acceptable in ideological struggle, but must be expunged from science.
10. Rancière, op. cit., pp. 71-4, 78-9. The essay in question referred approvingly to Mao Tse-tung's *On Contradiction*. According to Rancière the concept of the *bévue*, the "oversight", has its pragmatic origin in this encounter. ibid., p. 79.
11. ibid., Ch. 2. It is only much later (1972-3) that Althusser actually spelled out the relationship between humanism, economism and historicism and revealed that he had really been attacking economism (ESC, pp. 86-90). P. Anderson, op. cit., p. 39, sees Althusser's anti-humanism as subversive of the humanist rhetoric of the PCF in the 1960s. However the subversive character of Althusser's argument was selective, aimed only at the right opposition within the party, and not the leadership itself. The distinction between science and ideology enables Althusser to oppose "theoretical humanism", and so to oppose "Italianism" within the party, while recognising that it may be "necessary" for socialism to adopt a humanist ideology (cf. "Marxism and Humanism" in *For Marx*).
12. Rancière, op. cit., pp. 74-7, 94-102. Rancière dates the positive interest of the PCF leadership in Althusser's work from 1965. ibid., p. 77. Althusser presents this reversal in ESC as the result of cosy discussion with the party leadership about Spinoza!
13. Cf. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Penguin edition), London, 1976, pp. 96, 173-4 and footnotes. L. Colletti, "Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International", in *From Rousseau to Lenin*. London, 1972, defines revisionism by its conception of the economy, tracing this conception to later marxism and to bourgeois sociology.
14. *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 125, 132, 304.
15. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, Moscow, 1962, p. 90.
16. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 798.
17. J. Banaji,"Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History", *Capital and Class*, 2, 1977, offers an excellent critique of this theory of modes of production, even if his alternative is rather idiosyncratic. J. Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* is the standard statement of it.
18. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 196-7. Althusser's *Reply to John Lewis* originally appeared in *Marxism Today* and is reproduced in ESC, see especially pp. 86-90. E. B. Pashukanis,

Law and Marxism, London, 1978, offers the classic analysis of the foundations of the legal form and its connection with commodity fetishism. Such a marxist critique of bourgeois ideology reveals also the basis of the complexity of the bourgeois category of the subject which Althusser reduces to the term "man" and identifies with any form of humanism: "The net result of abstracting these definitions from the actual social relation they express, and attempting to develop them as categories in their own right (by purely speculative means) is a confused jumble of contradictions and mutually exclusive propositions" (ibid., p. 152). Althusser's tangle of contradictions derives from the theory of ideology he takes from Lacan. This is one of the more esoteric areas of Althusserianism that I shall not look at in detail. Very roughly "ideology" in Althusser's later work is any theory that posits a subject of society. Ideology is necessary for everyday life, because the individual must imagine him or herself to be a subject to function properly in society, but ideology is also always distorted because society is a complex reality that outflanks the subject. Thus science has to understand society as the complex reality beyond subjects, the complex whole that is partially misrepresented in particular ideologies. Clearly this theory of science and ideology raises problems of the relation between the two, for how can there be a knowledge of the whole that is not partial? This has led Hindess and Hirst to reject the distinction between science and ideology and to follow Foucault in seeing society as consisting in no more than the sum of "discourses" through which individual subjects live their relation to society, thus leaping from positivism to pragmatism in one mighty bound. The problem arises because of the radical discontinuity introduced between experience and reality which makes it impossible to reconcile the two. The result is to propose that we must renounce one or the other. Hindess and Hirst make a speciality of disproving their own theories by a *reductio ad absurdum* and then espousing the absurd instead of abandoning their theories. Such are the perils of the life of the mind.

19. I am concerned here only with Althusser's relation to the Communist Party in the mid-1960s. Subsequent developments have seen the leadership espousing the "Italian" deviation that has come to be known as Eurocommunism, leaving Althusser out on a limb. He has subsequently become mildly critical of the party leadership on occasion.

20. Althusser would call this an "expressive totality" because every aspect expresses the functional determination by the whole. He counterposes this to the "structure-in-dominance". Since, however, the "dominance" of a particular level is itself determined functionally, this seems to be no less an "expressive totality".

21. Cf. the programme of the collection "Théorie" (edited by Althusser) which was printed on the cover of its early volumes, including FM and RC: "The 'Théorie' series aspires to take heed of

the *de facto* encounter that is happening before our eyes between, on the one hand, the conceptual development of the philosophical principles contained in Marx's discovery, and on the other hand , certain works in the fields of epistemology, the history of ideologies and of knowledge and in scientific research." Quoted by G. Therborn, *Science, Class and Society,* London, 1976, p. 57n.

22. I have discussed Poulantzas's work at length elsewhere: S. Clarke, "Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas's Theory of the State", *Capital and Class,* 3, 1977, and " Capital, Fractions of Capital and the State", *Capital and Class,* 5, 1978.

23 Stripped of its radical rhetoric this convergence between "radicalising" sociology and PCF revisionism may be seen as an expression of a political convergence. Lebowitz, *Science and Society,* 37, 1973, pp. 385-403, has argued that the debate between neo-classical and neo-Ricardian economics expresses the struggle between the bourgeoisie and a technocracy which is radicalised by the experience of the growing contradiction between capital and labour expressed in terms of the irrationality of capitalism and not of the class struggle. It therefore underpins a utopian socialism based on a moral critique of capitalism which counterposes the rationality of the eternal relations of production to the irrationality introduced by bourgeois relations of distribution, and so seeks to overthrow the latter while preserving the former. This replacement of a class critique by a moral critique, itself based on a distributional view of classes, is also found in radical sociology. It is, moreover, the basis on which the European communist parties are seeking to widen their appeal.

24. This assertion has particularly incensed Althusserian readers, for it implies the self-evidently absurd proposition that "knowledge is a process with a subject", for which absurdity I do not apologise. I do not imply that Marx's work it "transparent", complete and without ambiguity. Precisely because it is the work of subject, not the mechanical product of a "problematic", it is very incomplete and often ambiguous. This should not detract from the fact that the *central thrust* of Marx's work is clear and insistent, and it should not distract attention from what Marx actually wrote to what he might have written.

25. L. Althusser, *Politics and History*, London, 1972, pp. 52-3. For Montesquieu the "nature" of government refers to the form of sovereignty (monarchy, despotism, republic), the "principle" to the "human passions" which underlie the different forms.

26. ibid., pp. 49-50, 53. Montesquieu also anticipates Althusser's Marx in linking ideology to class via interests. ibid., p. 93.

27. As Rancière points out, Althusser systematically obliterates the young Marx's originality with respect to Feuerbach by seeing Marx's *historisation* of the Feuerbachian problematic as a simple application, op. cit. pp. 24-6. This historisation already transforms the Feuerbachian "problematic" by transforming the status of the Feuerbachian categories from natural categories to forms of

historical existence. I shall not discuss Althusser's exposure of the idealist character of Marx's early works in this paper. In so far as Althusser's schematic comments have any value they derive largely from A. Cornu (*Karl Marx et F. Engels*, Paris, 1955). The idea of the epistemological break depends not on an interpretation of Marx's work but on Althusser's philosophy of knowledge.

28. FM, pp. 57, 77-8, 82. It is ominous that Althusser believes that the French political scientists and English economists gave Marx "his decisive experience of the *direct discovery* of reality via those who had *lived* it directly and *thought it with the least possible deformation*". The English economists had already described the "actual mechanism" of exploitation "as they saw it in action in English reality" FM, p. 78. (Original emphasis unless stated otherwise.) Althusser has considerably modified his interpretation of the break. He now believes that the philosophical break, which is based on Marx's adoption of a proletarian political position, preceded the scientific ("epistemological") break. Moreover the latter did not replace error (ideology) by truth (science), but rather was a break with *bourgeois* ideology on the basis of *proletarian* ideology. It was still an epistemological break, however, because it introduced the (scientific) opposition between truth and error (ESC, pp. 65-8, 121).
29. FM, p. 187n.
30. FM, p. 91. The discussion of Marx's relation to Hegel is centred on the extremely vague notion of the "problematic" whose function is to give scientific status to caricatures. The discussion really has nothing to do with Hegel at all. The term "Hegel" is clearly used to refer to the unmentionable Stalin, but even Stalin's dialectic is more complex than Althusser's caricature allows. In particular Stalin does not have a concept of an "expressive totality". For Stalin the contradiction between forces and relations of production arises precisely because of historical lags that mean that the relations of production have a different "temporality" from that of the forces of production. The forces of production develop continuously, the relations of production discontinuously. This could be called the "ratchet" theory of history, the ratchet being the device by which continuous motion is transformed into discontinuous motion (cf. Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, and the errors in Edward Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*).
31. FM, pp. 99,101.
32. FM, p. 111.
33. FM, p. 97.
34. FM, pp. 113, 100.
35. This is the sense of the famous discussion in the *Grundrisse* of the concept of population: "The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed" (ibid, p. 100).
36. Cf. R. Rosdolsky, "Comments on the Method of Marx's Capital", *New German Critique*, 1, 3, 1974, p. 71, who compares the contradictions into which stalinism is led to those which befell

Ricardianism. Althusser finally abandons any marxist conception of value in his preface to *Capital,* vol. 1, in *Lenin and Philosophy* (hereafter LP), London, 1971, p. 87. A. Cutler, B. Hindess, P. Hirst and A. Hussain have belatedly come to the conclusion that Marx's theory of value is irrelevant to Althusserianism. Their *Marx's "Capital" and Capitalism Today,* London, 1977-8, is essentially a rehash of the standard criticisms of the theory of value.

37. FM, pp. 166-7. This conception replaces the "universal concept of Feuerbachian 'practice'" with a "concrete conception of the specific differences that enables us to situate each particular practice in the specific differences of the social structure" (FM, p. 229). Sociologists call this the principle of "structural differentiation" and it is based on the functional division of labour of a harmonious society.
38. FM, pp. 168-70. Glucksmann, op. cit., discusses at length the metaphysical implications of this conception.
39. FM, p. 173.
40. FM, pp. 201-2.
41. A liberal defence of science that has very reactionary implications when it comes to the defence of the academy. L. Althusser, "Problèmes étudiants", *Nouvelle Critique,* Jan. 1964. Cf. J. Rancière, op.cit., chs. 2 and 6. It is this conception of practice that underlies the systematic confusion of science as a social and science as a mental practice, between the social relations within which science is accomplished and the process of scientific production itself. Theoretical practice is for Althusser *both* a social practice which is part of the complex structured whole, and is *also* a privileged practice in which the unity of the whole is accomplished, in which it achieves its "knowledge effect". RC, pp. 66-7. Cf. A. Callinicos, *Althusser's Marxism,* London, 1976, pp. 113-14. Note that the term "*relative* autonomy" means "autonomous in relation to" and not, as it is sometimes interpreted, the absurd notion of "more of less autonomous".
42. FM, pp. 166, 167, 173, 184. No explanation or defence of this progressive reduction is given.
43. This is the sense of Marx's discussion in *Capital,* volume 1, of the transition from manufacture to modern industry discussed at length by Balibar (RC, pp. 233-41). Marx, *Capital,* vol. 1, pp. 548-9 is unambiguous.
44. FM, pp. 167-9, 175-6, 178-80, 210, 215.
45. An alternative conception of the structure of the marxist totality implicit in this essay is developed in the theory of *Darstellung* in *Reading Capital.* In this conception the economic is permanently present in the political and ideological realms, on the analogy of the presence of the Freudian unconscious in the conscious as the "absent presence of a present absence". The economic, like Lacan's unconscious, exists only in its effects. The philosophical inspiration for this conception is not Marx but Spinoza. It is only by recourse to the Spinozist conception of the relation between God and Substance, with the economic taking the role of God and

the political the role of Substance, that Althusser can find a place for the economic at all. Since it is only an act of faith that can establish the determination, even in the last instance, of the economic once a secular, bourgeois, conception of society is adopted, it is hardly surprising that Althusser's dominant philosophical inspiration is that of metaphysical theology. The theory of *Darstellung* has been devastatingly criticised by Glucksmann, op. cit., pp. 83-8. It was abandoned as part of Althusser's self-criticism since it is an essential foundation of his theoreticism in its implication that the structure is only visible to the Theorist. It cannot therefore survive the subordination of the priesthood to the secular power.

46. Cf. "Lenin wrote that 'politics is economics in a concentrated form'. We can say philosophy is, in the last instance, the *theoretical* concentrate of politics"(ESC, p. 38).

47. This is reflected in Althusser's formulation of the distinction between the technical and social division of labour which is the key to his practical defence of revisionist politics. Rancière, op. cit., pp. 243-8.

48. T. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, NY, 1937; *The Social System*, Glencoe, 1951. Parsons enables us to fill many gaps in Althusser's theory. For example, the theory of functional prerequisites provides us with the means of identifying and delineating the practices which make up the complex social practice in a rather less arbitrary and *ad hoc* manner than that adopted by Althusser (cf. FM, p. 191).

49. This conclusion is very clearly drawn in Althusser's preface to *Capital*, volume I, in which he argues that trade-union struggle is necessarily defensive because it can only concern the rate of exploitation (L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 82-3). This inept preface has been tactfully demolished by E. Mandel, in *Contre Althusser*, Paris, 1974. N. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, London, 1973, p. 86 makes the same distinction between trade-union and political struggle.

50. Cf. Poulantzas, "Vers une théorie etc.", op. cit., pp. 1979-81.

51. The idea of ideology as a necessary mystification runs through all of Althusser's work. The theory is developed in an essay published in 1970, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" (in *Lenin and Philosophy*). Rancière (op. cit., pp. 140-7) offers a devastating critique of this essay. May 1968 had undermined the Althusserian conception of ideology as an imaginary relation, replacing this with a conception of ideological domination as a system of material power relations embedded in and reproduced by specific institutions. Althusser adopts the rhetoric of the latter conception to reproduce his own, idealist, theory of ideology. The idea of the ideological state apparatus is therefore purged of its radical content, for ideological struggle becomes once more the task of the philosopher. The political condition for this reactionary position was the "stabilisation" of the universities after 1968, in

which the PCF participated with enthusiasm. Althusser maintains the old idea of ideology as imagination, analysed not through an analysis of the functioning of the ideological apparatus, but through an *ahistorical* analysis of ideology as "interpellation" of the subject, the apparatus then being simply the means by which the illusion is foisted on the dominated. Rancière also discusses the *sociological* character of Althusser's conception of ideology, which emerges clearly from an earlier text "Théorie, pratique théorique et formulation théorique. Idéologie et lutte idéologique" (mimeo, n.d.). In this text ideology is given an explicitly *sociological* function, which is to permit agents to perform the tasks determined by the "social structure": "In a class society, as in a classless society, the function of ideology is to guarantee the *bond* between men in the ensemble of the forms of their existence, the relation of the individuals to their tasks fixed by the structure . . ." Further on the "primary function" of ideology is defined explicitly as its indispensability for "social cohesion", and this latter is referred to something called the "social structure", which is *prior to* the division of society into classes (ibid, pp. 29-31), quoted by Rancière, op. cit., pp. 229-31). (Cf. N. Poulantzas, *Political Power,* pp.206-8.) In the "Ideological State Apparatus" paper this function is fulfilled by the interpellation of the subject, which is the necessary condition for individuals to relate to the real relations within which they live. This in turn is because, it is stressed, the reproduction of the relations of production is secured "for the most part . . . by the legal-political and ideological superstructure" (*Lenin and Philosophy,* p. 141). Thus Althusser reproduces Durkheimian functionalism to the last detail: the function of the collective conscience is to ensure social reproduction by constituting biological individuals as social actors. Different societies then differ according to their forms of individuality, which is functionally related to the form of the division of labour.

52. ESC, pp. 55-7. Althusser is only able to set Vico against Marx because of this extraordinary assertion that the relations of production are natural relations. Cf. Marx's endorsement of Vico, *Capital,* vol. I, p. 493n.

53. This "sociological" conception of the separation between the economic and the political, that corresponds to a surreptitious contrast between the technical and the historical, between production and reproduction, between the natural and the social, and between the immutable and the mutable, is very different from Lenin's distinction between trade-unionist and revolutionary politics. It is a conception that can be found equally in Stalin's version of the distinction between the forces and relations of production, in the political economists' distinction between the production and distribution of wealth, in the sociologists' distinction between economy and society. It should not be surprising, therefore, that academic marxism should also be very vulnerable to it. The "sociologisation" of marxism as an

alternative to (or an eclectic combination of) both stalinism and bourgeois sociology was pioneered in Britain by the new *New Left Review* which introduced Althusser to the Anglo-Saxons as part of its project of making old-fashioned marxism more "sophisticated" by complementing "economism" with a variety of sociological theories, without ever challenging the economistic conception of the "economy", or coming to grips with anything so mundane as capitalist production. Edward Thompson, in his early polemic against this tendency, hit the nail on the head when he noted the historical, capitalist, category of the "economic", drawing out William Morris's lesson that capitalist society was founded upon forms of exploitation which are *simultaneously* economic, moral and cultural, and concluded that "social and cultural phenomena do not trail after the economic at some remote remove: they are, at their source, immersed in the same nexus of relationship" (E. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English", *Socialist Register*, 1965, pp. 254-6).

54. RC, pp. 35-6, 40-1, 130n.
55. RC, pp. 27-8.
56. Several commentators have noted the similarity of Althusser's philosophy of science to that of Thomas Kuhn (e.g. D. Schwatzman, "Althusser, Dialectical Materialism and the Philosophy of Science", *Science and Society*, 39, 1975-6, pp.321-24), in that for Althusser science is based on the transformation and development of problematics, for Kuhn it is based on the transformation and development of paradigms. However there is a major difference: for Kuhn a scientific revolution is an irrational event, while Althusser's theory remains firmly within positivistic rationalism. Althusser's philosophy of science has rather complex origins. Althusserians relate it to the work of the surrealist philosopher Gaston Bachelard, but it extracts only one aspect of Bachelard's work and reinterprets it in the light of the French conventionalist tradition of Poincaré and Duhem as developed by Cavaillès and Granger in the light of Vienna positivism. For all these thinkers the defining feature of science is its separation from reality. Since we have no direct access to reality, realism can only be an ideological illusion. Science can only work on ideas, thus the task of science is to investigate the relations between ideas, not the relation between ideas and some supposedly independent reality. In particular science simply seeks to purify our ideas of the irrational by formalising and systematising the ideas with which it is presented in order to eliminate any contradictions. Science therefore has only one foundation, the principle of non-contradiction. The aim of science is to detach ideas from any subjective considerations that are dominated by the ideology of naive realism. Thus science seeks not truth, in the sense of correspondence with the world beyond science, but consistency. The locus of scientific activity is therefore transferred from the consciousness of the scientist to the concept, thought becoming the

development of a system of concepts of which the thinker is not conscious.

This philosophy is not as strange as it often appears in Althusserian guise. The basic idea is that of neo-positivism: science starts with a series of observation statements that have to be organised into a deductive system. Thus science involves observation and formalisation as its empirical and theoretical phases, formalisation seeking to develop theoretical statements from which observation statements can be deduced without contradiction. However, the major problem positivism has always faced is that of distinguishing between "theoretical" and "observational" statements by discovering a neutral observation language. Carnap originally proposed the language of physics as the neutral language of a unified science, but this privilege was indefensible, and so Carnap adopted a principle of tolerance so that the language selected was arbitrary. From here it is a short step to Neurath's conventionalism which effectively abolished the separation between theory and observations, an abolition pushed to the limit in the work of Bachelard and Cavaillès.

The history of positivism is long and complex, but this extremely formalistic and rationalistic version proved untenable almost as soon as it was formulated. On the one hand, consistency is only provable for certain incomplete mathematical axiomatisations, so the theory's validity is at best confined to limited mathematical applications (Cavaillès was concerned only with mathematics while Bachelard saw mathematics as the model for all the sciences). On the other hand, studies in the history of science reveal that a toleration of inconsistency is often essential to scientific progress, the best-known example being the coexistence of the corpuscular and wave theories of electromagnetic energy. More generally the neo-positivist philosophy of science has collapsed and is progressively giving way to realist interpretations.

This neo-positivist philosophy of science has been ontologised by Foucault, a former student of Althusser's, and, following Foucault, by Hindess and Hirst and others. In this philosophy of the concept human individuals become simply the instruments of an impersonal thought, the "problematic", "episteme" or "discourse" that they live out. Both reality and the subject become constructs of the concept, having no independent existence, so there is no escape from the tyranny of the concept. If a link to reality is desired it can only be established by some kind of "transcendental correlation", which almost inescapably entails a faith in a supreme being who guarantees the correspondence between thought and the real (Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 74). The source of this ontology is Heidegger, not Marx, the Concept replacing Heidegger's Being (see M. Dufrenne, "La philosophie du néo-positivisme", *Esprit,* 1967; E. Morot-Sir, *La Pensée Française d'aujourd'hui,* Paris, 1971), but it is also strongly reminiscent of Durkheim's collective conscience. If discourses exist prior to those

who live within them, then this philosophy calls forth an objectivist theory of meaning that can establish the meaning of the discourse as being immanent within it, and not constituted by a subject. Thus it leads directly into Durkheimian semiology derived from Lévi-Strauss and French neo-Saussureanism. Finally Lacan's psychoanalysis,also inspired by the Durkheimian Lévi-Strauss, provides a theory of the subject as the construct of the discourse, "interpellated" into the discourse, giving the illusion of subjectivity that is the basis of the illusory character of all ideology (cf. S. Clarke, *The Foundations of Structuralism*). Thus from a simple tautology, that words are not the same as the things they denote, Althusserianism develops into an all-embracing metaphysical fog which tries to deny the existence of anything but the Word. The proponents of this metaphysic usually defend it on the grounds that it is materialist, not that it is marxist. It is supposedly materialist because it sees knowledge as the result of "practice" by analogy with material production, the product of the mechanical application of logical precepts to a given raw material requiring no human intervention. Could any materialism be more mechanical, less marxist? Althusserianism has succeeded in extracting the rational kernel from the mystical shell of the Hegelian dialectic, but it throws out the kernel, the concept of contradiction, and retains the shell.

57. This is the only connection specified by Althusser (RC, pp. 53, 58, 141). Although he insists that his theory is not idealist (RC, pp.41-2), his insistence on the radically anti-historicist understanding of science (RC, pp.133-4) seems to imply that science depends on its insulation from reality, and so implies a theory of science which can only be idealist. The task of philosophy on the new definition is to maintain this insulation. Hence the absurd idea that Lenin wrote *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* to defend *science* (cf. Rancière, op. cit., pp. 115-21, Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher,* London, 1975).

58. With his self-criticism this point is clarified and modified. On the one hand, Althusser makes it clear that Marx was simply the name of the place where marxism happened as a mutation of German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism on the basis of the class struggle (ESC, p. 56). On the other hand, the break was not with ideology in general, but with *bourgeois* ideology, proletarian ideology making the break possible (ESC, p. 121).

59. Almost all commentators see Althusser as a bourgeois philosopher, including many Althusserians in the wake of Althusser's self-criticism: P. Hirst, *Theoretical Practice,* 2, 1971. Cutler and Gane deny that this is the case, but only by arguing that Althusser seeks not guarantees but knowledge of scientificity, which doesn't raise any problem of correspondence with the real because science makes no reference to the real: "*real* modes of production constitute an inexistant (imaginary) object" (A. Cutler and M. Gane, "On the Question of Philosophy", *Theoretical*

Practice, 7/8, 1973, pp. 37-8, 46). Conventionalism is as much a variant of the bourgeois philosophy of science as is agnosticism of theology: it refuses an answer instead of denying the question. Despite its apparent liberalism in denying the scientist privileged access to reality, it simply displaces the privilege of the scientist by locating it in his own domain. B. Hindess and P. Hirst offer a demonstration by *reductio ad absurdum*: the Asiatic mode of production does not exist because the scientist (or Hindess and Hirst) cannot construct it as an imaginary object (*Precapitalist Modes of Production*, RKP, London, 1975, Ch. 4). Conventionalism is only one position implicit in *Reading Capital* (cf. ESC, p. 192, where Althusser recognises the risk of nominalism "and even idealism". He believes that it is sufficient to assert the primacy of the real over thought to escape the difficulty). We also find crude positivist references to one-to-one correspondence (pp. 68,255), and the quasi-logical positivist reliance on the privileged access of theory to the "essence of practice in general" (FM, p.169, cf. RC, p. 216, Glucksmann, op. cit., pp. 73-5). I shall not discuss the contortions of Althusser as bourgeois philosopher, but see note 56 above and compare the definition of the problematic of bourgeois philosophy given in RC, p. 35, and the idea of bourgeois philosophy as handmaid of science, remedial response to scientific crisis (or even condition of an epistemological break), rather than as an ideological response to a scientific advance.

60. The new definition of philosophy subordinates philosophy to the class struggle, abandoning the autonomy of theory (ESC, *passim.*). However, the role of the philosopher, representative now of the proletariat instead of Theory, is unchanged. The main difference is a political one: the philosopher has no basis on which to challenge the authority of the party in matters of theory. (Althusser argues that "marxism affirms the primacy of politics over philosophy" but indicates that philosophy is not the "servant of politics" because of its "relative autonomy" (ESC, p. 58n). However he has now deprived himself of any basis on which to contest the authority of the party, and so "relative autonomy" becomes quite abstract). The philosopher is still guardian of revolutionary purity, now defending a spontaneous materialist against the intrusion of the dominant bourgeois ideology, instead of defending a higher rationality against the false ideas which come from social practice. Although the sources of truth and error are inverted, it is still the philosopher alone who can distinguish them. Thus the new definition retains the key features of Althusserianism: the neutrality of science and the necessity of philosophy. Philosophy now joins the class struggle in science, the object of which is not the opposition of mental to manual labour, the appropriation of the creativity of the worker by capital, but the struggle between spontaneous materialism and intruding idealism! The task of philosophy is to identify the class enemy within, the insidious presence of words (rather than problematics — Cutler and Gane, op. cit., pp. 38-40) which contaminate the innocence of the

spontaneous materialist, to draw a "theoretical dividing line between true ideas and false ideas, a political dividing line between the people (the proletariat and its allies) and the people's enemies. Philosophy represents the class struggle in theory. In return it helps the people to distinguish in *theory* and in all *ideas* (political, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) between true ideas and false ideas" (L. Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon", *NLR*, 64, 1970, p. 10. Rancière offers a penetrating critique of the new definition, op. cit., ch. 3. Cutler and Gane, op. cit., show its philosophical incoherence). This is precisely dogmatism: scientific truths are elevated to the status of eternal truths as philosophical theses which become the indubitable foundation of science itself (cf. Althusser's argument against Lewis in exactly these terms, ESC, pp. 61-2). Is it just coincidence that the new definition emerges as the challenge to the PCF moves out of the universities, and becomes precisely the attempt to subvert the "innocent materialism" of the workers with seditious words? Althusser, the PCF, and the management of Renault can unite in defence of the innocence of the honest worker.

61. The term *sinnlich-übersinnlich* is applied by Marx to the commodity. *Kapital* I, Berlin, 1952, p. 84.

62. These are the terms in which Marx and Engels conceived their work in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The theoretical conclusions of the communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes." (*Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 46.) Cf. J. Rancière, "Mode d'emploi pour une réédition de *Lire 'le Capital'*, *Temps Modernes*, 1973. Althusser appears to have moved towards such a conception in ESC, but he does not spell it out, nor does he develop its implications for his earlier arguments.

63. As Brohm argues, Marx clearly retains the basic laws of the Hegelian dialectic: the idea of the "process of theoretical abstraction as dialectical concretisation", the idea of "the dialectical relation between law and phenomenon, essence and appearance" and the idea of the negation of the negation (suppressed by Stalin for his own good reasons). J.-M. Brohm, "Louis Althusser et la dialectique matérialiste", in *Contre Althusser*, pp. 62-82. Cf. Nicolaus's foreword to his translation of the *Grundrisse*, London, 1973. It should be remembered that "Hegel" in Althusser's discourse is only a straw-man, standing in for the "historicist" humanism-economism couple. Hence Althusser's presentation of Hegel is, to say the least, schematic and misleading.

64. For which reason Marx didn't publish it, as he notes in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* (*Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 361).

65. RC, p. 41, *Grundrisse*, pp. 101-7. Cf. p. 94: "production and consumption . . . appear as moments of one process, in which

production is the real point of departure and hence also the predominant moment."

66. "These categories therefore express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence, and often only individual sides of this specific society." ibid., p. 106.
67. Engels, "Review of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*", *Selected Works*, vol. I, pp. 372-3. This review is important because, although it tries to popularise, it relates the accomplished Critique back to the unpublished 1857 Introduction. That the work was no trifle is best shown by the development of Marx's analysis between 1857 and 1867. The chapter on Money, written one month after the 1857 Introduction, continues to apply the dialectical method in an idealist manner, so that, for example, the contradiction between the commodity as value and as use-value is constituted in thought (*Grundrisse*, p. 145). In this chapter Marx is straining to get beyond such formulations (p. 151) and does succeed elsewhere in the text (cf. p. 204). But he does not establish an adequate formulation of the materialist dialectic in the analysis of the commodity and of money until the *Critique* and, more completely, *Capital* itself.
68. *Grundrisse*, pp. 93, 99-100. It seems likely that *in a formalistic sense* the latter passage provides the inspiration for the Althusserian conceptualisation of the relation between the various "instances" ("A definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange, as well as *definite relations between these different moments.*" ibid., p. 99).
69. Marx, Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 374. Marx, Afterword to Second German Edition of *Capital*, ibid., p. 456.
70. It requires the critical power of the rational, materialist, dialectic to overthrow this empiricism. "In its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time, also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary." ibid., pp. 456-7.
71. Engels, ibid., pp. 370-1. It is interesting to note that Althusser's earliest published work was a translation of Feuerbach.
72. Hegel is the theoretical source. As Rancière notes ("Mode d'emploi") the historical source is the slogans of the developing working class movement, slogans whose echo reverberates through all of Marx's works.
73. E. Bernstein, *Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus*, 1899, p. 42, quoted by Brohm, op. cit., p. 85.
74. Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 247.

75. RC, p. 108. The only coherent theory of history within this framework would be an idealist one in which the structures are inserted in the real as essence of the real. It is difficult to see how else the relation between such pure concepts as the "mode of production" and reality can be conceived than in the "ideal type" relation which Althusserianism constantly insists is idealist (A. Badiou, *Le Concept de Modèle,* Paris, 1969. Cf. RC,pp. 117-18; N. Poulantzas, *Political Power* etc., pp. 145-7). It is common for Althusserianism to reserve its most coherent criticism for the errors into which it falls itself. Poulantzas consistently formulates the relation between modes of production and social formations as the relation between theory and reality (ibid., pp. 15-16; *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism,* London, 1975, p. 22. Cf. Balibar, "Self-Criticism", *Theoretical Practice,* 7/8, 1973, p. 68). The only way to avoid this is to abandon the attempt to relate the "ideal type" to reality at all, and follow the logic of neo-Kantianism by abandoning reality altogether (Cutler and Gane, op. cit., pp. 37-8. 46; Hirst and Hindess, op. cit., *ad nauseam*). This structuralism is renounced by Balibar in his self-criticism (op. cit., pp. 60-61). B. Hindess and P. Hirst (op. cit., pp. 5-9) follow Balibar's self-criticism in concluding that there can be no general theory of modes of production, and so no theory of history. All we can have are general concepts which we then use to develop specific concepts which in turn produce an analysis of the current situation, the latter being a theoretical construct and not something given to theory (ibid., p. 4). The reason for this is familiar: "The reproduction of the transformation of a determinate structure of social relations is the outcome of specific class struggles . . . conducted under certain definite conditions" (ibid., p. 9). What a paradox: anti-historicism is pushed to the limit only to end up, having expelled history definitively from theory, handing history over to the class subject and its study to the empiricism of bourgeois historians. This is the paradox of bourgeois philosophy — history can only be *either* "real" *or* "ideal". In their later work Hindess and Hirst resolve the paradox by abandoning the antinomy of theory and reality in favour of a realistic pragmatism. Note that Stalin does not fall into the "historicist" deviation as defined here by Althusser. For Stalin, the relations of production always *lag behind* the development of the forces of production and this is the source of the *conflict* that for Stalin (as for Althusser) replaces Marx's concept of *contradiction.* Thus Stalin, in *Dialectical and Historical Materialism,* offers precisely the complex structural whole that Althusser espouses.

76. RC, pp. 157, 160. Cf. C. Colliot-Thélène, "Relire 'le Capital' ". *Critiques de l'économie politique,* 9, 1972.

77. Hence "this epoch-making conception of history was the direct theoretical premise for the new materialist outlook." Engels, op. cit., p. 372.

78. This error is not just a slip. Further down the same page we find even more explicitly: "The economic concepts of constant and

variable capital, of Department I and Department II, are merely the economic determinations, in the field of economic analysis itself, of the concept of the *material* conditions of the labour process." Compare his Ricardian definition of wages (*Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 126), and above all his rejection of Marx's theory of value as Hegelian in his Preface to *Capital*. This law is reduced to "a special case of . . . the law of the distribution of the available labour power [*sic*] between the various branches of production", ibid., p. 87. "Vulgar economists commit two kinds of errors: (1) either they assign the 'economic definiteness of form' to an 'objective property' of things (Marx, *Capital*, vol. II, p. 164) . . . (2) or they assign 'certain properties materially inherent in instruments of labour' to the social form of the instruments of labour (ibid.) . . . These two mistakes, which at first glance seem contradictory, can actually be reduced to the same basic methodological defect; the identification of the material process of production with its social form, and the identification of the *technical* functions of things with their *social* functions" (I. Rubin, op. cit., p. 28. The definitive stalinist verdict on Rubin's interpretation was delivered at the so-called "Menshevik trial" of March 1931).

79. RC, p. 173. The quote could have come straight from Stalin.
80. The concept "mode of production" is rapidly increasing its scope as the essay progresses, from being a concept of the labour process expressing the mode of attack of the means of labour on nature to becoming the concept of the social whole itself. RC, pp. 173-8. Marx himself never used the concept consistently or systematically.
81. RC, pp. 177, 180, cf. ESC p. 125, where this is "recognised to be structuralist".
82. As Glucksmann notes, op. cit., p. 80, this anthropological foundation is implicit in *Reading Capital*. Cf. B. Hindess and P. Hirst, op. cit., pp. 14-15.
83. L. Althusser, "Théorie, pratique théorique", op. cit., p. 29, quoted by Rancière, *La leçon* etc., op. cit., pp. 229-30. This conception of ideology is identical to that of Talcott Parsons. Others have noted the remarkable similarity of Althusser's and Parsons's conceptions of theory (P. Walton and A. Gamble, *From Alienation to Surplus Value*, London, 1972), and of politics (Poulantzas, *Vers une théorie*, p. 1979, quotes T. Parsons, *The Social System*, pp. 126-7). Of course the bourgeois analysis of the whole leads immediately to bourgeois analyses of the functionally differentiated "relatively autonomous" levels. Hence "all the levels of the social structure . . . imply specific social relations" (Balibar, RC, p. 220). These levels conventionally implicate classes, status groups and parties. A "marxist" analysis uses the same term, class, for each level but this is no more than a rhetorical device, for the content of the term is identical to the sociological concept at each level. Hence Althusserianism legitimates Poulantzas's attempt to pass bourgeois political sociology off as marxism by wrapping it in the

accredited radical terminology. In the same way it legitimates, by giving marxist credentials to the bourgeois conception of ideology as imagination, neo-Freudian accounts of ideological "systems of representations", which again show a marked convergence with Parsons's work.

84. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 97.

85. It is because Althusser's "anti-historicism" involves the abandonment of a dialectical, historical materialist, method in favour of an analytical one that Althusserianism is compelled to pose the question in the latter terms. These are precisely the terms of analytical philosophy's critique of marxism: cf. G. A. Cohen, "On some criticisms of historical materialism", *Aristotelian Society Supplement*, 44, 1970, pp. 121-42. Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., p. 19, see determination in the last instance by the economic as something to be founded "in the concept of the economy itself".

The entire project of these authors is based on the attempt to establish *analytically* the conditions of possibility of society, or of particular modes of production. They have successively reached the predictable conclusions firstly, that one cannot establish *analytically* the conditions of existence of a given historical society, for one can only establish the logical precondition of a *concept*. Thus "theory" can only study the concept of the "mode of production" and has no purchase on the concrete reality of the "social formation". They have then discovered that it is not possible to establish *analytically* the relations of determination postulated by marxism between different forms of social relations, nor the relations of succession between different modes of production, and have therefore concluded that marxism is arbitrary, based on hypotheses that are analytically gratuitous. This conclusion should come as a great comfort to marxists, for the implication is that marxism is not simply a series of tautologies. It is a theory with a real historical content. Edward Thompson deals with this aspect of Althusserianism in his critique, *The Poverty of Theory*, bringing out the political implications of this sort of sociological arrogance. Marx criticises Hegelianism for exactly this sort of idealism, that believes that the features of capitalism can be discovered in the concept of "capitalism", in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*.

86. RC, pp. 175-6. The quote is from *Capital*, volume III. Cf. E. Laclau, "The Specificity of the Political", *Economy and Society*, 4, 1, 1975, pp. 104-6.

87. Before *Reading Capital* Althusser regarded the latter work as a "positive study" rather than a "systematic exposition of Marx's theoretical position" (FM, p. 47)! Cf. Pashukanis, op. cit., J. Holloway and S. Picciotto, "Capital, Crisis and the State", *Capital and Class*, 2, 1977.

88. This argument occupies a considerable proportion of the text of *Reading Capital*. It is based on the radical separation of thought and the real, the claim that a concept cannot be historical because it

is founded in theory, and so falls with this separation. It is worth noting that if the concept of mode of production is purely in thought it is difficult to see how history can be either its starting point or its product. The belief that it can be is what constitutes Balibar's project as a structuralism. Hirst and Hindess solve the problem in their parody of Althusserianism by abolishing history altogether, op. cit. (conclusion).

89. RC, pp. 201-15.
90. The theory has an "anti-evolutionist" character, breaking with any idea of a "progressive *movement of differentiation* of the forms" or "*a line of progress* with a logic akin to a destiny". RC, p. 225. It is "historicist" as soon as it tries to explain history as projection of structures, though. Cf. note (15).
91. RC, pp.226-7, 229. A thoroughly Ricardian definition — what is this "mode of appropriation of the social product" if not a relation of distribution? In this passage Balibar systematically adopts Adam Smith's definition of productive labour in terms of the "material nature of the labour and its objects" (p. 232).
92. RC, pp. 236-9. Balibar presumably means unity of *labourer* and means of labour in this passage. In the quote above he presumably means that the capitalist owns means of production and *labour power.* Symptomatic slips! Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., reproduce such slips, e.g. p. 11. Cf. L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy,* p. 87. N. Poulantzas, *Political Power,* p. 32. As Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 81, points out, this contrast is only sufficient to distinguish capitalist from non-capitalist modes of production, as indeed is the definition of modes of production itself. It might seem that this distinction introduces a break with the *eternisation* of capitalist social relations. This is not the case, for the small producer is simply the "self-employed" capitalist who has always featured prominently in bourgeois ideology. Balibar merely seeks the technical conditions which make "self-employment" possible. Hirst and Hindess take up Glucksmann's criticism, mistaking Balibar's position for that of Marx, op. cit., pp. 227-9.
93. "Self-Criticism", op. cit., p. 56. Balibar appears to have transposed Althusser's terminology, so that Balibar's "deter-minant in the last instance" signifies Althusser's "dominant instance". It is also not clear whether "dominance" refers to the really or the apparently dominant "level". In the quote from Marx on p. 217 of RC, Marx makes it quite clear that he is concerned with the appearance, for in Rome "its secret history is the history of its landed property". Cf. *Grundrisse,* p. 97. In all the confusion we get the impression that Balibar has actually explained determination in the last instance! This illusion is fostered by the ambiguous use of the term "mode of production". Mutual functional interdependence in the whole is determination by the "mode of production" if the term refers to the whole, but not if it refers to the "economic". Cf. note (80).
94. RC, pp. 222-4. The instances are now completely autonomous, if it is determined that they be determinant. Determination in the last

instance now simply means that the economic will determine that it doesn't determine anything.

95. *Capital*, vol. III, Moscow, 1962, pp. 770-2. RC, p. 233.

96. RC, p. 217. Poulantzas cannot make up his mind either: *Political Power*, pp. 15, 32, 70.

97. "Self-criticism", op. cit., pp. 65-6.

98. Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., ch. 5, offer a development of this approach. They follow the implications of Balibar's self-criticism in criticising the arbitrary character of the assumed political intervention, realising that forces and relations of production are not independent. They therefore ask what are the technical conditions for given relations of "surplus-product appropriation", i.e. relations of distribution, by asking what are the technical conditions which enable the feudal landowner to intervene politically to separate the direct producer from his means of production. They then locate the power of the landowner in the reproduction of this separation, so denying that relations of personal domination are essential to the feudal mode of production. They don't seem to realise that this is because they have described a disfigured capitalist mode of production, a feudal Robinsonade, in which "self-employed" small producers are exploited by a class of capitalist landowners and merchant capitalists who lease means of production to them. Hindess and Hirst can abolish relations of *personal* dependence only because they implicitly assume the prevalence of generalised commodity relations to impose *class* domination through the operation of the market. This is only implicit because they see the state as a market substitute, imposing "competition" on the peasantry. It is fortunate that their theory is not meant to have any relation to reality. The idea that feudal rent is based on the effective right of *exclusion* of the peasant would have surprised many a feudal lord.

99. The theory of "state monopoly capitalism" reproduces the critique of feudal society expressed by classical political economy. It is now the monopolies which are using political intervention to modify relations of distribution artificially, and the communist party which criticises them on the basis of the eternal character of capitalist relations of production, seeing in "market socialism" the resolution of the contradictions of capitalism. Cf. Poulantzas, *Political Power*, pp. 55-6, for which both pre-capitalist modes and monopoly capitalism require state intervention.

100. Cf. A. Aumeeruddy, B. Lautier and R. Tortajada, "Labour Power and the State". *Capital and Class*, 6, 1978.

101. For Marx this relation of dependence is clearly a *class* relation and not as Hindess and Hirst imagine, an intersubjective relation between particular individuals. It is only the attempt to impose feudal relations of distribution on a capitalist mode of production that leads to the belief that feudalism is contrasted with capitalism by the necessary role of the political in the former. Within this framework political intervention is explained not as an aspect of

the imposition of a class relation on the members of the society, something central to every class society, but because "relations" do not correspond to "forces" of production, as they supposedly do in a capitalist society.

102. RC, pp. 214, 219. In the feudal mode the landlord is "agent of co-ordination . . . agency of combination"(Hirst and Hindess, op. cit., pp. 238-9). Cf. Poulantzas, *Political Power,* p. 25.

103. Because "surplus labour" is primarily a *functional* concept for Althusserians, only the mode of *appropriation* determines whether or not it is inserted in exploitative social relations. This makes it very difficult to identify class societies non-arbitrarily, cf. Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., pp. 24-8, 67-8. L. Althusser, Preface to *Capital,* p. 88.

104. RC, p. 212.

105. RC, p. 233. Paradoxically this definition can give rise to "humanist" temptations, for only *subjects* can own things.

106. This is especially difficult in the capitalist mode of production since it doesn't appear directly in legal form.

107. RC, p. 232. According to Balibar this is Marx's position. As P. P. Rey (*Les Alliances de Classes,* Paris, 1973, pp. 93-111) points out, in *Capital* it is only exceptionally and metaphorically that the relation of production is described as a property relation. Marx is not concerned with this analytical question, but with the question of historical primacy. Cf. *Grundrisse,* p. 98; Preface to the *Critique, Selected Works* I, op. cit., p. 363.

108. "To the extent to which their ideology is freed from bourgeois and petit-bourgeois conceptions, the masses will not recognise one another as 'men' nor seek to claim their 'human dignity'." S. Karez, *Théorie et Politique: Louis Althusser,* Paris, 1974, quoted by Rancière, *La leçon,* op. cit., p. 161.

109. Marx's analysis of the "circuit" of social capital is clear and unambiguous: *Capital,* vol. 1, ch. 23 and vol. 2, chs. 1-4. Too often a "symptomatic" reading is a substitute for the harder, but more rewarding, work of an actual reading.

110. Balibar inverts the relation between production and reproduction, so that analysis of the latter introduces no "new conditions" (RC, p. 263) but is rather simply an account of "the relation between the *totality* of social production and its particular forms (branches) in a given synchrony". (RC, p. 264). Balibar doesn't understand that analysis of production *presupposes* that of reproduction (Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 82). Cf. the amazing contortions of Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., p. 270, where the revolutionary theoretical distinction between capitalism "in form" and capitalism "in the strict sense" is introduced to get to Sraffa's neo-Ricardian definition of capitalism as "commodity production by means of commodities".

111. Cf. on this point S. Clarke, "'Socialist Humanism' and the critique of economism", *History Workshop Journal,* 8, 1979.

112. RC, p. 213.

113. Rancière, *La leçon,* p. 244.
114. RC, p. 174.
115. RC, pp. 214, 238-9.
116. The concept of Asiatic society has had the most chequered career subsequently, buffeted by changes in the role of the state in capitalist society, by the development of the "socialist" state, and by the anti-colonial struggle.
117. This follows ultimately from the failure to root "relations of production" in production, and so the belief that the transformation of relations of production is conditioned by the political rather than by the level of development of the forces of production. This essentially "sociological" view of the development of capitalism, most clearly expressed in Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy,* Allen Lane, London, 1967, is also found in marxist work: cf. P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State,* London, 1974; Hindess and Hirst, op. cit.; and my own *The Development of Capitalism,* London, 1974.
118. "The original unity between a particular form of community (clan) and the corresponding property in nature . . ., which appears in one respect as the particular form of property — has its living reality in a specific *mode of production*". *Grundrisse,* p. 495. Cf. pp. 471, 485-6, 489-93.
119. ibid., p. 84.
120. RC, p. 213. "Property, in so far as it is only the conscious relation . . . is only realised by production itself. The real appropriation takes place not in the mental but in the real, active relation to these conditions." *Grundrisse,* p. 493.
121. ibid., p. 489. This is why Marx uses the rather misleading term "property" throughout this text. He is seeking to show that bourgeois property is simply an expression of a "naturally arisen . . . historically developed" relation. ibid., p. 485.
122. Poulantzas, *Political Power,* pp. 30-1, 126, offers a confused analysis of this text based on the definition of relations of production as purely economic relations. But the distinction between political and economic cannot be *prior to* the definition of the relations of production. (Cf. Laclau, op. cit., pp. 104-6.)
123. These appearances must be sharply distinguished from the real presupposition, the real relation of the individual to the objective conditions of his or her life. The concept of the Asiatic mode of production does not stand or fall on the presence or absence of particular forms of legal property nor, for that matter, of communal forms of labour. The concept allows for variation in the forms of labour, the legal and ideological forms, and the political forms. Hence much of Perry Anderson's criticism (op. cit., appendix) of the concept is beside the point. It need hardly be added that Hindess and Hirst's "proof" of the impossibility of the Asiatic mode is as incoherent as the rest of their book (op. cit., ch. 4).
124. *Grundrisse,* op. cit., 415, 483-4.

125. "'As long as the labour process,' we read in *Capital,* 'is only a mere process between persons and nature, its simple elements remain common to all social forms of development.' But every particular historical stage of this process 'further develops its material foundations and social forms.' And precisely these social *forms,* in contrast to the naturally given 'content', are what is important" (Rosdolsky, op. cit., p. 66).
126. This is the logical implication of Althusserianism, implicit in *Reading Capital* and developed by Hindess and Hirst, op. cit. "Historicism" comes back in since the class subject is the only agent capable of transcending the existing mode of production and introducing a new one. J. Banaji, op. cit., offers a devastating critique of the approach to modes of production which takes the form of exploitation as its starting point. See also S. Clarke, "'Socialist Humanism' and the critique of economism", op. cit.
127. *Grundrisse,* op. cit., pp. 493, 489, 495-6.
128. ibid., pp. 486, 475.
129. RC, p. 215.
130. RC, pp. 239, 272. It is because the relations are purely formal that they can only be *changed* by being *transformed.* Hence we find Althusserianism taking up the structuralist opposition of reproduction — stasis and revolution-transformation. This gives the rhetoric a radical appearance — "no change without revolution", but in fact represents a repetition of old conservative positions — "no change without revolution, so no change". It is interesting that the Althusserian opposition of structure and practice, and of structure and history, reproduce those of functionalist sociology, and most specifically of Lévi-Strauss. In each case the only way of avoiding that stasis which results from seeing the process as a simple expression of the structure is to introduce a transcendent subject of history. For both Althusser and Lévi-Strauss this subject can only be the scientist. Cf. my *The Structuralism of C. Lévi-Strauss* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, 1975, chs. 4 and 5).
131. RC, pp. 284-91.
132. RC, pp. 304-7. We have at last reached the break with stalinism. The stalinist dialectic is inverted so that it is the relations of production that dominate the forces of production. This means that there is no longer any evolutionism, since the development of the relations of production is indeterminate, to be resolved by the contingent outcome of particular political struggles.
133. RC, p. 306. Cf. Poulantzas, *Political Power,* pp. 87-9, who criticises this conception, only to hand the same function to the state: "The function of the absolutist state is . . . to produce *not-yet-given relations* of production (i.e. capitalist relations) and to put an end to feudal relations: its function is to *transform* and to *fix* the limits of the mode of production" (ibid., pp. 160-1).
134. RC, pp. 215-16. Only in these two modes do the forces and relations divide up their "supports" in the same way. RC, p. 303. The feudal

mode cannot be characterised by correspondence, since the political is there dominant. Poulantzas tries to get around this difficulty by distinguishing between homology and correspondence, *Political Power*, p. 27n, without specifying what distinguishes the concepts from one another.

135. Balibar, "Self-criticism", op. cit., pp. 66, 63.
136. ibid., p. 63. This doesn't mean that he abandons Ricardianism, merely that he now sees the relations of distribution as dominant in the combination. The capitalist mode of production is still "a mode of appropriation of the unpaid labour of others which is only distinguished by a 'different way' of extorting it" (ibid., p. 68). Even after Hindess and Hirst, it is not clear what is meant by "dominance" in this context.
137. ibid., p. 60. These three points sum up the "originality" of Hindess and Hirst with respect to Balibar, mark I.
138. The other alternative is the economism of E. Terray, *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies*, MRP, 1972.
139. Hence the class struggle in production has nothing to do with the revolution, which must be left to the political programme of the proletarian party, which alone can create the revolutionary conjuncture.
140. It is not clear whether the new social formation is to be created by a real class or by the concept of class. Balibar's argument depends heavily on his claim that the new structure cannot develop out of the old because its elements are constituted independently of one another, and so are debris of the destruction of the old, not developments out of it (RC, pp. 276-83). This claim is nonsensical. If the separation of labourers from their means of production is not *at the same time* concentration of these means of production in the hands of capitalists, then production would cease. "The same process which placed the mass face to face with the *objective conditions of labour* as free workers also placed these conditions, as *capital*, face to face with the free workers", K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 503.
141. *Selected Works*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 363.
142. *Grundrisse*, op. cit., p. 476.
143. RC, p. 359.
144. *Grundrisse*, op. cit., pp. 486, 493-5.
145. For marxism, therefore, class struggle is not a dynamic practice counterposed to a static structure. This opposition of structure and process is characteristic of metaphysical materialism which finds the fixity of its categories compromised by the flux of history. For marxism the structure is itself a structure of processes, the fixed points are moments of a developing totality. Cf. Poulantzas, *Political Power*, pp. 64-5, who separates relations of production from social relations of production and opposes them as structures to practice.
146. C. Meillassoux, *Anthropologie économique des Gouro*, Hague, 1964; Terray, op. cit.; Balibar, "Self-criticism", op. cit.; A. Cutler,

"Response", *Theoretical Practice* 7/8, 1973; Hindess and Hirst, op. cit.; Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, op. cit.

147. RC, p. 67. This is exactly the same phenomenon as we find in bourgeois sociology, where the division between high theory and empiricist research, both slaves to the same banal bourgeois ideology, guarantees both by leaving the ideology itself unquestioned as debate centres on the "opposition" between empiricism and theoreticism. In the case of Talcott Parsons this is not immediately obvious, since he presents a very familiar ideology in a particularly systematic way. When we come to a work like Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., it becomes transparent. The supposedly "theoretical" arguments of that work are unconvincing because they are in fact empirical claims which are too often patently false. The constant reference to some supposedly theoretical "necessity" cannot conceal the fact that this "necessity" rests on unsystematic, inconsistent, often incoherent, and not infrequently false, empirical premises.

148. *Grundrisse*, p. 197.

149. L. Althusser, Preface to volume one of *Capital*, in *Lenin and Philosophy*. One significant feature of this concept is its use to consign the theory of fetishism to the realm of ideology. This is ironic because it was theory, the centrepiece of the Althusserian theory of *Darstellung*, which was at the core of the version of marxism presented in the first edition of *Reading Capital*. The loss of this theory derives from its supposed implication of a "free social individual" contemplating the appearance as form of presentation of the essence. "Essence" and "appearance", it is argued, are simply scientific and ideological concretes-in-thought, which correspond to a single concrete-real, the real appearance. Later Althusserians abandon the distinction between science and ideology as an arbitrary one, so that "essence" and "appearance" are simply different, equally valid, points of view emerging from different discourses. This is the basis on which Cutler, Hindess and Hirst and Hussain, op. cit., reject any priority that might be claimed by marxism. While this is the logical consequence of the Althusserian version of Marx, based on the opposition of structure and process and of theory and reality (and so a nominalist view of theory), it has nothing to do with Marx's theory of fetishism, since (i) both essence and appearance are equally real, the essence describing the processes of which the appearances are discrete moments; (ii) fetishism does not implicate the free social individual contemplating a structure, but the social individual engaged in the practical activities which are the structure.

150. Rancière, *La leçon*, pp. 22, 24, 26.

151. *Réponse à John Lewis*, Paris, 1973, pp. 48-9 (cf. ESC, pp. (63-4).